

# A Promise I Will Keep

by The Queen of Asgard

Category: Halo

Genre: Romance, Sci-Fi

Language: English

Characters: Arbiter, Cortana, Master Chief/John-117, OC

Pairings: Arbiter/OC

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2011-09-18 07:31:18

Updated: 2015-07-10 21:19:24

Packaged: 2016-04-27 01:13:17

Rating: M

Chapters: 8

Words: 28,598

Publisher: [www.fanfiction.net](http://www.fanfiction.net)

Summary: She never imagined that falling in love would come with scraped knees, broken limbs and war but that's exactly what Dr. Emmaline Jackson got when she fell head over heels with the Arbiter. But when allied lines become blurred and scattered and your world falls down around you, can you keep a shattered promise? (Formerly Lend me Your Hand.) Arbiter/OC, being rewritten! R&R!

## 1. Perfectly Broken

\_"Lieutenant Jackson?" \_

\_She turned around, her eyes lingering on her work for a few more moments before finally turning to face the person standing in her doorway. He was tall, rugged. Pretty good looking if she hadn't already been married. She thought Kyle looked better than any of these monkeys that ran around the base. In all honesty, she didn't want to talk to him, since she was right in the middle of some insanely important research. There was some things that cracking cracking a book open would solve in this world. One of them just so happened to be the pronunciation of a rather difficult Sanghelli word that she was on the cusp of understanding. \_

\_"Yes, what is it?" She asked sharply, her voice cracking like ice across a frozen winter landscape. The private winced, like he had been physically struck before entering her office to hand her a stark white slip of paper, handsome black ink staining the crisp page.\_

\_"I'm so sorry for your loss, Lieutenant." He murmured softly before nearly running from her office. Pursing her lips in confusion, Jackson looked down at the paper, following the uniform black lines that stretched out across the paper. With each word, her lips moved in a silent prayer, as if the page she had just received would bring someone back from the dead. If it would bring her husband back from

the dead. \_

\_She dropped the paper and whipped off her glasses, racing over to the door to shut it quickly. She tried so hard to contain herself behind an ice fortress and now...now her guard had left his post to join his own mortal coil. \_

\_Kyle was dead. \_

\_Tears stained the page while her nose ran but she chose not to wipe it. Instead, she merely inhaled loudly and rubbed her eyes, trying to read the rest of the page. The rest paled in comparison to the original six sentences. Killed in the line of duty while out on a patrol...a pack of Elites...what you would expect from the death of an enlisted. Sargent Jackson would receive full penance for his demise and it reassured her that he felt no pain in his passing. Bullshit. The Covenant was the infamous for supplying long, painful deaths to Marines they encountered. \_

\_Jackson closed her eyes, head buzzing, trying to figure out what she should feel. Anger? Sorrow? Shock? Oh yes, there was definitely shock there. The only real anger she felt was towards her commanding officer that he used his lackey, probably a private, to deliver the news of Kyle's death. \_

\_She brushed the paper aside and opened her eyes, interlacing her fingers to think for a moment. She wondered if they were able to find his body. She knew his family would like to give him a proper burial. Personally, Jackson was a big fan of cremation but they would have to talk about it...that was if they could find the remains.

\_

\_Suddenly, the door burst open and Emmaline's eyes snapped up, her heart almost stopping. There, in front of her was her husband, covered in mud, his head lolling to the side with lacerations all up and down his neck. He pointed an accusing finger at him, his slack expression changing into one of anger. \_

\_"You...did this to me..." He groaned, coming at her. The door slammed behind him and Jackson jumped up to try and escape his grip. However, she couldn't move as he approached her, fingers itching to wrap around her larynx. \_

\_"No, please Kyle! It wasn't me!" She cried as her late husband stumbled closer, Army boots thudding against the polished floor of her office, hollow and empty like promises on a wedding day. \_

\_His cold, bloated digits wrapped around her neck, the life was leaving her body...\_

\* \* \*

><p><em>Beep! Beep! Beep!<em>

Emmaline Jackson sat up, drenched in a cold sweat, putting her hand up to her throat in terror. Thankfully, no bruised throat to speak of which made her take a deep breath. Just another nightmare, she realized. The doctor told her that it was normal but she liked to challenge normal. She was good at that.

Sliding her body out of bed, she shivered, realizing just how cold her apartment really was. Who the hell had turned down the heater?!

"Tom, heater please." She commanded, her usually dark, smooth voice froggy with sleep. Yawning, she grabbed a sweatshirt and shoved it on, stumbling from a neatly sleek bedroom to an even sleeker living room. The blinds were slightly open and Emmaline yawned again, waving them open. It was cloudy, just like any other day in New London, the streets below already bustling with early morning commuters. It was her sort of morning. The sort of morning that didn't mean she was going to have to fight for her life. She shivered, trying to put the memory from her mind.

Flicking hazel eyes to the coffee mug on the low sitting table in the middle of the room, she wondered just how lazy she was feeling and whether or not a cup of coffee left overnight would be worth an extra 5 minutes in bed.

Deciding since she had kicked the heater on, she would actually put on a pot of new coffee and go get ready for the day. She dumped out the coffee in the mug and walked back into the bedroom, shedding shorts and her sweatshirt. Thankfully, most of the day she would wear a lab coat but she enjoyed looking feminine and chose a charcoal grey pencil skirt and pastel pink tank top with a blazer before pulling her hair back into a French Twist, a favorite of Emmaline's.

"Tom! Turn off the fucking heat!" She snapped, realizing her stupid unit hadn't been programmed to keep the temperature at a normal setting. The coffee machine gurgled in the kitchen and Emmaline padded out to grab a new mug. Inhaling the aroma, she instantly felt herself perk up from ultimate bitch to ice queen. When she had been in the service, she had been the butt end of a never ending joke about how she had been drafted to be a Spartan but was kicked out for being too mean. Of course, there had been more to the joke but Emmaline didn't bother listening to their petty words and snide comments.

Sipping her coffee, she finished putting on her makeup and grabbed her favorite Mary Janes, shoving them on her feet. God, she looked frumpy. However, time didn't permit her to change so she grabbed her work satchel and opened the door to another day in the world.

If only that day had been so normal.

\* \* \*

><p>The company that Emmaline worked for, Janus Industries liked to consider itself an industry unlike any other in. They worked in tandem with the military, giving jobs to the veterans that survived the Covenant wars. Emmaline's department ran through ancient findings and documentation, trying to decipher whatever they could from ancient words and written letters. If anyone knew about the power of words, it would be Emmaline who had spent much of her life, nearly 10 years, studying Forerunner documentation. And now, here she was again, walking through the gilded halls of a titan of industry. Poetically tragic that so many unsung songs and misunderstood epics came here to die.<p>

"Hey Em." A tall Asian woman greeted, falling into stride with the

shorter woman. Emmaline flicked her eyes up to meet those of her companion, her best friend and confidant, Cameron Yu.

In all honesty, nobody could really know the horrors that Emmaline faced during her time in the Covenant wars but fortunately Cameron was the closest thing she would ever get to seeing a psychiatrist. They had tried to get her to go after the war ended but in all honesty, Em hadn't want some idiot in a white coat to sit there and mumble while she spilled her secrets. There was a reason that there was a wall of ice that surrounded her. Cameron was her best friend and confidant, or as close to a confidant as she was ever going to have.

"So, are we going out for drinks tonight?" Cameron inquired, carefully stepping on broken glass. She knew that Emmaline didn't usually go out but that didn't means things couldn't change. The only other time Cameron had managed to get Emmaline out for drinks was when she had been seeing some guy named Alex from some department that Cameron had never even heard of. He had come along with them and made a total ass out of himself. Enough so that Emmaline dumped him right there and then. Not like Cameron could see her best friend in a relationship with someone who wasn't calm, cool and collected but she knew that if anyone was going to bring Emmaline out her shell, it would be someone who understood her and was passionate about cracking her wall.

"Nah, I'm good. You go on without me. How is Li doing, by the way?" Emmaline asked, putting her hand down on the warm, somewhat squishy pad that read her handprint. The scanner took a few minutes longer than usual before finally spitting back that there had been an error in reading her prints, "Oh you have got to be kidding me!"

"Ah, Dr. Jackson. I should have known it was going to be you," An AI popped up next to her and she winced slightly, "Reading too many books again? You know what the old pages do to one's fingerprints."

"You know I hate getting chastised by you, Archie." She chided with a small smile. Em didn't really smile but Cameron knew that they shared a connection that hardly anyone else in the entire building shared with the systems AI. After a few moments, he nodded her through, Cameron scanning her own hand. She was instantly recognized.

"Didn't you get that book pad for your birthday?" Cameron asked as the two walked across the handsome white limestone lobby, a fountain gurgling in the middle of the room.

"Yeahâ€¦but it's just not the same. I love my books." Em shrugged, glancing up at the glass floor, busy with people above them, "They're like my children. My 10,000 children."

Cameron laughed and then shrugged, "Whatever you say, Em. Also, to answer your question, Li's doing well. He's in Japan right now on business. Something to do with his family, I don't really ask questions." Li was Cameron's, a quiet yet intense man who loved his wife more than anything in the world.

"That'sâ€¦good? I'm not sure how you would describe that," Emmaline admitted as the two of them waited for an elevator. The door pinged open, men and women in clothes ranging from business suits to white

lab coats entering and exiting the car.

"I would describe it as a business," Cameron finally said as the two joined in with the muted silence that descended over the elevator. Finally, the buzzer pinged pleasantly and a man's voice announced the floor they were on.

"Twenty Second Floor, Languages and Linguistics; head consultants, Dr. Richard Vaughn and Dr. Emmaline Jackson. Please watch your step while exiting the elevator."

"I guess that's me," Emmaline said with a shrug, "I'll talk to you when I get off work today. I have a feeling it's going to be a long one."

"Okay. I'll talk to you soon! We really should!" The elevator closed before Cameron could finish her thoughts. She worked up in neuro sciences, a couple floors from Emmaline. The coolness of the hallway enveloped her and her footsteps were muted on the plain gray carpet. They weren't a very flashy division but they worked their own interests into that of the other departments. The offices were humble and small and most were empty but she didn't mind. Emmaline reveled in the peace and quiet her workspace had to offer her.

She stopped outside the door marked "Emmaline Jackson, Forerunner Linguistics and Alien Languages" and unlocked it, turning to find an older gentleman walking towards her, two cups of coffee in hand. Her lips turned into a smile as Dr. Richard Vaughn offered her one of the cups. He was another person that could make Emmaline Jackson, Professional Scowler, as he liked to call her, smile.

"Ah thank you, Dr. Vaughn." She murmured, taking the cup of Joe in her left hand, still unlocking the door with her right, "You are my hero."

He laughed, the crow's feet at his eyes wrinkling. He was older, probably in his late 40's but still quite handsome with salt and pepper hair and a beard of the same. He wore glasses and was always smiling, telling Emmaline that she should learn by example.

"Your hero, eh? I didn't realize that merely bringing you a cup of weak-ass coffee would constitute me as your hero," He said with a laugh, "Director Lambert put out another one of her employee review things. Trying to cut down on departments again. I'm almost sure that we're going to be one of the divisions they're going to be looking at this time."

"Unfortunately, I think you're being too optimistic," Emmaline responded bitterly, "We're probably going to be the department going to the chopping block."

He shrugged and followed her into her office, sitting down on the small leather couch across from her desk, "You're probably right. We'll probably get sucked up into one of the culture departments or something."

"At least their offices are bigger," Emmaline chided, logging into her work station, "Fuck!"

Vaughn sat up with her obscure interjection, "What's

wrong?"

"Director Lambert has me set up in a meeting today at 1500. Fuck, I wonder what I did this time." Emmaline said with a snort.

"I don't even remember the last time I talked face to face with Director Lambert," Vaughn noted, taking a sip of his coffee while wincing, "I think it was when I was promoted to the head of this department."

"I think you may have spoken to her at this year's company Christmas party, Richard."

"Oh did I?! How come I don't remember it."

"I think you were drunk. You said she was really pretty and that she would look great on the cover of a magazine. I think she took it as a compliment, but don't quote me. That may be why you're the head of this place instead of in culture studies." Emmaline teased, scrolling through the rest of her messages.

"There's that sense of humor!" Vaughn cried out, making Emmaline jump slightly.

"Yeah right. My sense of humor ran away and eloped with my sense of style." She rolled her eyes and reached around her to grab her lab coat, "How's the deciphering going on the Forerunner tablet?"

"They're not," Vaughn admitted, "I sent Jones and Beckett in this morning to see if they could work anything else out with the new key you cooked up but it's nothing like they've ever seen. If you wouldn't mind going and checking it out, I would be super grateful."

"No problem! I've got some last minute Sanghelli translations I need to finish up in here for the treaty that they asked us to scribe but I'll be in in about an hour or so."

"Sounds good. Looking forward to seeing if you can crack any mysteries that our ancestors left behind." Vaughn did his mystical wavy arm thing and Emmaline arched an eyebrow.

"Seriously?" She asked with a scoff, hardly believing her superior's strange antics.

"Oh yeah. Seriously." He said with a little grin before departing her office. Emmaline chuckled and then began to whip up the rest of something that she was working with several Sanghelli diplomats that were hanging about. Apparently there was some unrest between an offshoot of the Covenant and to quell any rebellions, they ask treaty that would hopefully bring resolution to any remaining conflicts that still existed. Emmaline knew that the treaty spelled out what would happen, that being the binding between a human and Sanghelli with the hopes of a hybrid child. They had done the research and the statistics looked good for being able to bring forth a child naturally. The Sanghelli in question? Someone she knew rather well from their time together during the war.

\* \* \*

><p><em> -Africa, 2552, 5 years ago-<em>

\_ Emmaline stood at the memorial of soldiers on the African plain, tears rushing down her cheeks. She wasn't cold now. She wasn't the ice queen that her men and women expected her to be. She was a broken, unintelligible mess that wept openly. If so many others hadn't been weeping as well, eyebrows would have been raised when they saw such a strong woman crying. In her clenched fist was a picture of a youth with his arms wrapped around another woman. Both of them were smiling, warm and friendly, hazel eyes and green eyes sparkling with a passion that one seldom saw in the eyes of soldiers. They were strong alone but together, they were unstoppable.\_

\_ She looked up and placed the picture right next to one of a mother with her child, beaming up at the photographer. Touching the photo of her and her husband, her breathing became short and shaky.\_

\_ "I love you, Kyle." She whispered, placing her lips against the photo before moving away to allow someone else to take her place. She turned around to watch someone else crying in her place.\_

\_ "You loved him, didn't you?"\_

\_ She turned around, surprised to hear a deep voice speaking in English. It was accented but the accent couldn't be placed. Probably because it wasn't of this world. She looked up into the amber eyes of the Arbiter, strong against his gray-purple skin.\_

\_ "I did. We were married but he died on the Ring. I couldn't stop the Flood, as much as I wish I could." Emmaline replied, wiping tears from her eyes. "I wish I could have been there for him but they took him."\_

\_ "What was his name?" The Arbiter questioned, still looking down at her.\_

\_ "Kyle. His name was Kyle." I responded quickly, "I'm sorry, I don't think we've been properly introduced. I'm Lieutenant Commander Jackson."\_

\_ His mandibles flared slightly as if he was smiling slightly, "Thel. You may call me Thel."\_

\_ She nodded, "It's a pleasure to meet the savior of our races."\_

\_ "As it is a pleasure to meet the first human to master our language." He noted. She flushed under his words. Master was such an exaggeration.\_

\_ "Please, I've only just now gotten a grip on it," She admitted, "I mostly study Forerunner languages, those that are dead."\_

\_ "I understand," He contemplated with a nod, "There have been so many who have died in the names of the Forerunners, my brothers included."\_

\_ "What do you think of them now?" She asked.\_

\_ Thel looked down at her, his armor sparkling in the light, "I think

they should be left where they lie, not worshiped like gods or goddesses. Why should my brothers suffer in the sake of their names?"\_

\_ She smiled slightly, "I guess the same could be said about the Crusades. So many atrocities done in the name of gods and monsters."\_

\_ "Indeed, Lieutenant." Thel agreed, looking back at the wall where so many were gathered to say farewell to their loved ones, "Too many that have come and gone before their time."\_

\_ She glanced up at him and found herself having an epiphany. Some of the Covenant didn't want this war. They were good, honest creatures who wanted nothing to do with it. In a way, they were similar to humans, yet at the same time, so, so different.\_

\_ Thel began to speak in Sanghelli and it took me a moment to realize that he was speaking an old verse from an ancient tome that Emmaline herself even knew.\_

\_ "An old Irish blessing? I never knew Sanghellis were sentimental." She said with a little laugh.\_

\_ "I heard this blessing when I came to your world for the first time," He explained, "And I carry it now for my brothers who will not be returning to their families."\_

\_ She nodded, the poem mashing up between the Sanghelli language and English in her head.\_

\_ "Do not stand at my grave and weep,\_

\_ I am not there... I do not sleep.\_

\_ I am the thousand winds that blow...\_

\_ I am the diamond glints on snow...\_

\_ I am the sunlight on ripened grain...\_

\_ I am the gentle autumn rain.\_

\_ When you waken in the morning's hush,\_

\_ I am the swift uplifting rush\_

\_ Of gentle birds in circling flight...\_

\_ I am the soft star that shines at night.\_

\_ Do not stand at my grave and cryâ€”\_

\_ I am not there... I did not die..."\_

\* \* \*

><p>She finished the treaty in about two hours, looking down on my finished work. It was strongly worded but confident that we would be able to bring the rebellion groups to their knees. Emmaline snorted



at the idea of peace. It was a nice notion but a notion nonetheless. Poor Thel, being roped into an arranged marriage—She felt bad for him, having to go through with something like this but in all honesty, she was just a little bit relieved it wouldn't be her going through with it. She sent it up the chain to Director Lambert's desk and then stood, her back popping loudly.<p>

"I'm getting too old for this—" She grunted, walking from her office, the door shutting behind her. Down the hall, the labs were aglow while four figures sat at a table, drinking coffee and laughing. Dr. Vaughn sat with his feet kicked up smiling up at the pretty intern while Jones, fresh out of college guffawed while slapping Beckett on the shoulder. I opened the door and instantly, all four sobered up.

"What the hell is going on in here?!" She demanded, walking in and closing the door behind her, "Has anything gotten done today?"

"No, Dr. Jackson," Jones muttered softly, turning his head down, "We were waiting for you to get down with your translations."

"Well, "I'm done now so no need to worry about that now do we?" Emmaline asked with an arch of her eyebrow, "Alright, back to work you slackers!"

"Pfft, slave driver!" Richard teased with a grin. Emmaline rolled her eyes and grabbed her gloves, rolling up the sleeves of her coat.

"Don't encourage them, Vaughn."

They worked as a unit for about two hours until Emmaline's buzzer went off, indicating it was time for her meeting.

"Look, I'll be back down later but if I don't see some actual work getting done, I'm going to make you all stay here tomorrow."

"Aww, Dr. Jackson, it's Friday today! Can't we go home early like everyone else?" Beckett asked, comparing some glyphs on her key to some on the tablet.

"No, Dr. Beckett. You're going to stay here until you decipher at least a word. Come on, we've almost got a sentence done today!" She pointed out, sticking her buzzer back in her pocket, "I'll see you all soon."

"Don't get fired!" Jones teased as Emmaline walked out of the lab and down the hall to the elevator, shedding her lab coat. She dropped it on a table and straightened out her sweater, wishing she had worn something different this morning. Once the elevator had reached a certain floor, it stopped and waited for her to say a command. Nobody got passed this point without having reason to.

"Name?" The elevator inquired.

"Dr. Emmaline Jackson. I have an appointment with Director Lambert."

"Standby, please." It said pleasantly. After a moment, a green light appeared at the top of the elevator and it began to ascend again.

Finally, with a smooth stop, the doors opened with a pleasant \_PING.\_

"92nd floor, Director Lambert's Offices. Please watch your step while exiting." The door closed behind me and I was left standing in a posh lobby that made me feel like I was wasting money just standing there. The floor was glass, the underside being filled with live koi that drifted about lazily.

"Dr. Jackson?" I looked up to see a younger man sitting behind a mahogany desk smiling at me, "I assumed that was you. Director Lambert will see you in her office now." He nodded to a set of doors and I nodded in thanks. "Director Lambert, Dr. Emmaline Jackson is here to see you."

"Good, send her in." The voice on the other end responded as the double doors opened into a luxurious conference room, complete with a long table that matched the secretary's desk. Emmaline strolled in and looked into the eyes of her employer. They were kind but stern, like a mother's who had the best intentions but was gung ho on tough love.

"Ah, Dr. Jackson! It's a pleasure to see you again!" She beamed and Emmaline's eyes flicked to several other people in the room. Some were human, wearing UNSC uniforms, their ranks gleaming on their shoulders. Others wereâ€not quite human, but elites who sat in full battle armor, looking more out of place than an alligator at a tea party.

"It's a pleasure to see you as well, Director." She admitted, furrowing her brow, "Might I be curious to know what exactly you brought me here for?"

One of the men in uniform stood up. He was tall, wearing the white UNSC dress outfit with the 2 stars of a Rear Admiral, "Dr. Jackson, my name is Admiral Remy. We know you were the one who was writing the peace treaty between the Sanghelli people and humans."

"That I was," She stated calmly, "What is your point, Admiral?"

"My point is that we are gathering a group of men and women who have been in close contact with the treaty or the Covenant in one way or another. We also know of your connection between the Arbiter. These people, along with several high representing Sanghelli officials will be conducting a panel for a pool of candidates who have put their names in to be the one that is chosen to be the woman of the treaty."

"So what does that mean for me and my service? I told the UNSC when the war was over, I was done. My service is done, Admiral. I don't want to serve any longer."

"I'm afraid you do not have a choice, Dr. Jackson," An Elite spoke up, standing up to watch me with his cold amber eyes, \_"Thel Vadam has asked personally that you sit in on these interviews." \_

She realized that he had switched to Sanghelli and her lips fumbled to try and get the words just right. She was excellent at reading Sanghelli and listening to it but speaking it was another matter entirely.

"I respect The Arbiter's wishes, but I do not wish to return back to watch him take on a human bride." \_Emmaline admitted, looking back at the Director, "I'm not the right person for this job."

"Of course you are! You are literally the author of peace. Who better to be a deciding member of this council?!" Another woman spoke up, "We need you, Lieutenant."

She scoffed, "Lieutenant?! I haven't gone by that name in quite some time, Commander." She noted the woman's collar devices before moving on, "Surely there has to be someone else better fitted for this!"

"There is nobody!" The Elite snapped, "We need you! Thel needs you!"

I pursed my lips and finally nodded, "Fine. I accept."

The tension in the room seemed to dissipate when I said this, the members of the room breathing a sigh of relief, "What do you want me to do?"

"Well Doctor," Admiral Remy said with a little grin, "First of all, with this assignment, your rank and your rate have all been passed back to you. Welcome back to the UNSC, Lieutenant Jackson. It's going to be good to have you back."

\* \* \*

><p><strong><em> Welcome back, one and all to one of my all time favorite stories to write in my history of writing. After playing and replaying the Halo games, I decided that this story like several of my other ones, needed to be updated. It's by far the most popular thing I've ever written and I've been meaning to rewrite it for awhile. While the story idea remains the same, many key factors have changed within the writing, characters and plot ideas. <em>\*\*

\*\*\_I want to thank everyone who was a HUGE part of LMYH before. I am so glad that you liked the story beforehand. I hope I don't disappoint now! \_\*\*

\*\*\_With love and regards, \_\*\*  
><strong><em>Queenie <em>\*\*

\*\*\_Halo (c) 343 Industries\_\*\*  
><strong><em>Emmaline Jackson, OCs (c) The Queen of Asgard<em>\*\*

\*\*\_In honor of my first story, I didn't get rid of the Irish Blessing that she spoke in the first story but instead gave it to Thel to say. This will actually tie more into the story than it did in the first one. I apologize for any canon errors. Again, I have only played the games and haven't kept the chicken scratch writing I once had full of Wikia notes. \_\*\*

## 2. Eligibility

Emmaline finished zipping up her small bag and peered out into her

living room. Her landlord, Mr. Jefferson was sitting in the living room, waiting for her last deposit. She would be leaving nothing here except memories and a fucked up ONI console. Everything else would be going into storage.

She signed the check and walked into the living room, already in her old operational uniform. It still fit her like a glove but her nametag was coming off and the green was worn at the knees. She would have to get a new one if she was planning on staying in after this. Not like she was. She didn't even really like the idea of going back into space. They had given her the details. A month in space, she wasn't sure where, and then if she chose to stay in, the rank of Commander. She sort of liked the sound of that, Commander Jackson. However, regardless of what they dangled in front of her like a carrot on a string, she wouldn't budge.

She handed Mr. Jefferson the check and he slipped it into his pocket, arching an eyebrow.

"You seem pretty quiet, Emmaline," He said, sipping on his coffee, "Not like you were much of a talker."

"Yeah, it's a gift." She responded, scooping up a picture before dropping it into her bag. It was of her and Kyle on their second anniversary on Reach. The two had taken leave at the same time and the time of year they went couldn't have been more perfect.

"So what exactly does the UNSC want you back for?" he asked, putting his mug on the side of the sink. God, Emmaline hated it when people just left their stuff in or around the sink!

"It's classified," She snapped, "Something to do with the Covenant war."

His eye brows shot up to join his hairline, "Whoa! Are we going to back to war or something?!"

"No! Nothing like that. Apparently something to prevent war. They haven't really let me in on a lot of the details. They just want me back and they're giving me a shit ton of money to do it. Would you kindly put your mug in the dishwasher?"

He obliged and then walked over to the door, "Anyway, will I see you again, Emmaline?"

She shrugged and rummaged in a box to find her military jacket. Fortunately, she had kept most of her old things around and the only thing she had to go out and buy was a cover. Zipping it up, she turned back to Mr. Jefferson and gave him a ghost of a smile.

"I'm not sure. But if I don't, it's been a pleasure knowing you."

"You as well, Miss Jackson. Take care of yourself out there."

With a wave, her landlord was gone and she was left alone with boxes and bags ready to go into storage. She leaned against the couch and looked up at the bright blue sky, uncommon in the London area and sighed. She couldn't believe she had signed onto this or that she

even considered helping The Arbiter out. There was so much between them that had never been said that should have been.

\* \* \*

><p><em>It was three days after the memorial service. Emmaline sat along the officer's table with several of her friends, chatting idly. She was finishing up her stay at the Churchill Base while her discharge papers were being finalized. <em>

\_ The talk was easy and light. And ensign on the other side of her made a face and laughed at something a lieutenant across the table had said about a commander's mother. Admiral Langley spoke quietly to Captain Willis about the Sanghelli that remained and how it was affecting morale. \_

\_ Speak of the devil. The room grew tense and a pregnant silence hung in the air as a group of 5 Elites walked into the galley, led by their fleet master, R'tas Vadum. He was intimidating and the Arbiter at his side didn't really help lighten the mood. The other three were the same. Tall, intimidating and every marine in the room itched to take their gun out and shoot the group point blank. \_

\_ However, when Admiral Langley started talking loudly, the rest of the mess hall relaxed and started chatting idly, but still eyeballing the group of Elites nervously, trying to decide where they would sit. Emmaline's eyes lingered just a bit too long and caught Thel's. The two watched each other for a few moments before Thel moved between two tables. The marines kept a watchful eye out on the group as they moved through the crowd but it was easy to see where he would sit. The chair next to her was open and he sat down smoothly next to herâ€|a difficult task considering that he didn't fit at all. \_

\_ "Lieutenant," Thel greeted cordially. He wasn't eating. Emmaline wondered if they ate at all. \_

\_ 'Of course he does,' she chided in her head, 'He's flesh and blood just like me.' She turned to give him a small smile, "Hello again, Arbiter." \_

\_ "Please call me Thel," He said looking around the table, "I do not think I've been introduced to all your officers yet. \_

\_ "Arbiter, it's good to see you again," Admiral Langley said with a winning smile, "I'm so glad you decided to join us. Would you like something to eat?" \_

\_ "No thank you, Admiral." \_

\_ "So, when are and the other Elites heading back toâ€|What is the name of your planet again?" \_

\_ "Sanghelios," Thel and Emmaline said at the same time. She glanced up at him and he gave her an appreciative nod. \_

\_ "Exactly. So, when are you and your men headed back?" \_

\_ "In a week, your time." R'tas interjected sitting down on the opposite side of Thel. "Do you know much of our planet, Lieutenant Jackson?" \_

\_ "Not a lot," She admitted with a shrug, "but enough to keep me out of trouble. It's a hobby of mine, I'll admit." \_

\_ "And what is your area of expertise, Lieutenant?" Thel questioned just as she took a bite of her god awful food. After a moment of chewing, she looked up. \_

\_ "Forerunner history and language, mostly. I love learning new languages." She admitted, "Linguistics was always my forte in school and here." \_

\_ Admiral Langley scoffed, "What are you talking about, Jackson?! You're our girl on Forerunner languages! She's singlehandedly deciphered a letter we found on one of the ringsâ€¦ granted it was a little late but it explained to a woman who was trapped in one of the facilities that housed the Flood, wishing her love farewell. Truly tragic." \_

\_ Emmaline felt Thel bristle beside her with the mention of the ring. Emmaline felt her heart harden as well at the mention of losing a lost love and closed her mouth at any other mention of the words Flood or Forerunner. \_

\_ "It was nothing, Admiral." She murmured quietly. Thel glanced down at her and chose to say nothing, a wise move on his part. \_

\_ "A smart girl indeed," R'tas agreed, nodding at Emily. He held himself a little higher than Thel, regarding himself in a higher esteem. It was obvious. He was a Fleet Master, Emmaline knew that much but Thel was the Arbiter for crying out loud! He should have held himself higher. However, after all the blood he had shed, she could see why Thel would try and quiet himself. \_

\_ The meal finished up (she noticed that the Sangheli didn't eat) and they stood up to leave by two's and three's, exiting the mess hall in groups. \_

\_ She stood up as well and dumped her garbage into the bin, swearing that she would never again eat at the mess hall because it would indeed make her fat. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Thel bade the Admiral farewell and she turned to move back to her quarters, shared with several other female officers. Suddenly, she felt a hand on her arm and she gasped, turning around. There he was, standing there, his fingers interlaced firmly around her forearm. As soon as she had turned around, Thel had dropped his hand and nodded at her.

\_

\_ "I would like to see these tablets and learn what you have learned from them. To further advance my knowledge on the Forerunners." Thel admitted, his amber eyes never leaving Emmaline's. She gave him a small smile and a nod. \_

\_ "I would love the company, Arbiter." \_

\_ "I insist you call me Thel," He responded, his mandibles turning up into what appeared to be a mock smile. \_

\_ "Then I will insist you call me Emmaline, Thel." She said with a little laugh. She stuck out her hand and waiting for him to shake it.

—  
\_ "When will you study?" He asked, taking her hand and moving it.  
—

\_ "Probably tomorrow. I'll begin at 0800. You're more than welcome to join me. I hope to see you then." With a nod, she turned on her heel and Thel turned on his own and the two walked away from the meeting, both with lighter hearts.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Emmaline marched to the train station, head held high. It would take her to a space elevator about a hundred miles out of the city. At the rate trains were going today, she would be there in about in about 20 minutes. Joining the other commuters, she glanced up to see several men and women in combat gear as well who nodded at her. She nodded back but didn't speak to any of them. She was quiet the entire ride there, stepping off only at the last stop that pinged, "United Naval Space Command Space Bridge, authorized personnel only."<p>

She looked up, craning her neck to the space bridge. She wondered why on earth they would ever hold this thing off planet but in the back of her mind, she knew that tension was still tight on either side. The poor girl would have her work cut out for her for sure, soothing the ruffled prides of humans and Elites alike.

Emmaline followed the men and women up towards the small outpost, a young private checking off the names of each member who would be joining them, reading each one off in turn.

"Good morning, Chief Caius." There was a check of the badge and then he was allowed into the building. Why in the world they would have a private checking IDs was beyond her. It would be so much easier if there was an AI here but maybe they were tight in this sector. Not like there was a lot of traffic here—well, besides the normal. Maybe they used AIs on the heavier traffic days. Emmaline stopped in front of the kid who looked her up and down, noting her LTCDR collar devices.

"Er, good morning, Lieutenant Commander—" he snapped into a salute while checking her nametag, "Jackson. I don't think I know you."

"I'd be concerned if you did." She said without cracking a smile, "I'm on the admin board for the Arbiter's marriage arrangement?"

"Oh, of course! Silly me, I should have checked my datapad this morning," He said sheepishly, pushing an intercom button, "Hey Sargent? I have a Lieutenant Jackson here for The Arbiter's—Oh, okay. Let her in? Right away, Sargent." He took his index finger off the button and beamed at her, "You're good to go, Lieutenant."

She didn't even bother with a thank you. If they didn't know she was here for the Arbiter's arrangement then there was something definitely wrong. Frowning, she walked into the building and was patted down, to make sure she didn't bring anything into space that would danger herself or the crew. (Not like there wasn't a nice supply of guns on whatever carrier they were taking them to.)

Finally, when she was allowed to clear and she strolled down the corridors that led to the Space Bridge's main system.

"Lieutenant?" Someone called out her name. It was a female voice, bubbly and cheerful. Emmaline turned around to see a young woman running towards her, her face just as bright and red as her hair. She was pretty in a cute sort of way, long curly red hair falling from her messy bun, a pair of bright, doe brown eyes, and a massive amount of freckles across her cheeks. She couldn't have been more than 30 years old. She was tall and skinny, lanky even with almost no muscle definition. She gave Emmaline a lopsided smile, completed with a dimple on the left side. "Good morning Lieutenant! My name is Lieutenant Penelope Winter, but you can call me Penny if you like."

"Do I know you?" Was her curt reply. This girl was strange to be coming and introducing herself like this. The woman's blush turned even darker and she twirled a piece of hair in between her fingers absentmindedly.

"Uh...well...no. But I know you're on the board for the whole bachelorette thing." She laughed breezily, "Sorry, little running joke I had with some friends back home. "

"Let me guess," Emmaline asked with an arch of her eyebrow, "You're one of the lucky girls then, eh? Trying to make a good first impression?"

She bit her lip and shook her head quickly, "Actually," She said, lowering her voice, "I really don't want to marry him. I didn't volunteer for this. I was chosen...so were most of the other girls, actually. There was one or two that volunteered but for the most part, we were chosen at random for this assignment," She giggled nervously, a quirk that was quickly wearing Emmaline's patience down to a zero.

>She had to admit, this girl was strange and not at all what she would have expected for someone who was being considered a life partner for the Arbiter. "Look," Emmaline said, exasperated, "I'm still in the dark just as much as you are about this. In all honesty, I don't know what's going on and they probably won't tell me until I get on the ship and have something placed in front of me."<p>

She walked past the girl who made an 'oh' sort of noise and was left standing there for a few moments before catching up and walking in stride with Emmaline who wished the girl would spontaneously combust so she wouldn't have to listen to her talking. It wasn't so much of the talking that really wore down Emmaline. It was the fact that this girl had latched onto her like a leech to a fat, juicy leg that really twisted her panties into a bunch. She mostly talked about her home life, family, friends, that sort of thing. She hadn't been in the UNSC for very long, mostly at the tail end of the war.

"I study plants," She stated simply, "I want to be a botanist when I get out of the UNSC. What did you do?"

"Uh," Emmaline didn't want to seem rude but she really did not want to carry on a conversation with Miss Penny Winter. God, what a corny name, Penny Winter. It sounded like the name of some clichéd character from a clichéd book that Emmaline might have read once and then stuck under her bed to gather dust, "I study Forerunner



artifacts. I do a lot in linguistics."

"So you're a language officer then? That's really cool! Do you think you could teach me some Sangheli?"

"I thought you were trying to stay away from the Arbiter."

"Wellâ€¦it's a cool language, can't help but be interested." She shrugged as they approached the Space Bridge landing, "Oh well I guess this is us! I think they're taking us to the Witching Hour, that's a newer cruiser they put into commission not too long ago."

"Fascinating," Emmaline said in a bored tone of voice. Obviously this girl could not take a hint.

Penny stopped in her tracks, cocking her head over to the side slightly, "You don't seem very friendly."

"Ah, the crux of the matter," Emmaline responded sarcastically, "I'm not a friendly person, Lieutenant. I've seen too much shit to be friendly anymore."

Penny nodded but stepped in to stand beside Emmaline. She had to admit, for annoying as the Lieutenant was, she couldn't help but admire her spunk. Maybe there were some qualities that the UNSC could use in a girl like her. "Are you married?"

"Huh?" Emmaline muttered, coming out of her thoughts. She glanced over at Penny who was looking at her expectantly.

"Are you married?" She repeated the question slowly, waiting for Emmaline's reply.

"I was," She admitted, "But he died during the wars."

Penny nodded sympathetically. Emmaline mentally kicked herself. Why the fuck had she told this woman who she barely knew that her husband had died on the ring?! However, instead of launching into the whole "I'm so sorry" routine she had come to expect from so many people, the redhead remained quiet.

"I lost my brother on the ring too," She said softly, "It's part of the reason I joined when I did."

"Iâ€¦" Emmaline stopped herself before she could say "am sorry." She never was at the receiving end of that news. It was always her telling people and hearing them pour out meaningless condolences. They had lost someone too. An uncle, a friend of a friend, a niece, a neighbor. She knew that they meant something to someone but in all honesty, she never really paid attention to who. All she knew was that she had lost her husband and that was that.

"It's okay," Penny said automatically, like Emmaline did when she wasn't really paying attention, "We weren't that close anymore anyway." She looked over at Emmaline and her face brightened suddenly, "But hopefully finally going out into space will take my mind off of things, you know?"

They had been talking and Emmaline hadn't noticed the Space Bridge even moving, taking them upwards to another station. She watched the world disappear behind a layer of clouds and she swapped her bag from one shoulder to another. Whatever was about to happen, she would allow it to beâ€|even if it meant losing.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Hi! So, I don't think a lot of you knew I was going to be rewriting LMYH but here I am...on the ball, already writing chapter 3! Not bad for one day's work! I am really, really looking forward to getting where this needs to go and where it should have been the first time I wrote it. Thanks to everyone for reviewing...even if Chapter One apparently didn't work. <strong>

\*\*Anyways, welcome back if you're an old reader or hello, if you're a new one! This was a masterpiece for me at the time, the longest thing I've ever written with the most reviews I had ever hoped to get on a story so short. Hopefully, I don't dissappoint the masses with this rendition, so if you will lend me your hand, I will show you the stars. \*\*

\*\*Queenie \*\*

\*\*Halo (c) 343 Industries, Microsoft\*\*

><strong>Emmaline Jackson, OCs (c) The Queen of Asgard<strong>

### 3. False Hopes

\_ "I was thinking about you, \_  
><em>Thinking about me, <em>  
><em>Thinking about us, <em>  
><em>What we gonna be, <em>  
><em>Opened my eyes, <em>  
><em>It was only just a dream."<em>

\* \* \*

><p>The Witching Hour was a smaller ship, about 100 people made up her crew and she was the first of her kind, all bright and shiny on the inside. It still smelled like fresh paint when they stepped off the carrier shuttle and looked around. Several people were waiting for them, including the captain of the ship, Captain Isobel Cobb. Emmaline and Penny saluted sharply when they first stepped off the ship and Emmaline noticed a few other officers behind her who merely glared.<p>

"Welcome on board The Witching Hour," Isobel greeted, "Lieutenant Commander Jackson, I presume?" She said her, eyes flicking to meet those of Emmaline.

"Yes Ma'am," Emmaline nodded, all traces of her civilian life gone. How quickly they snapped back into attention when they got right back down to it. Captain Cobb gave her a tight lipped smile.

"The council that is seeing over the interviewing process is holding a conference in the bridge area. If you would go and join them, I'm sure they would be ever so pleased."

"Of course, Ma'am." With another salute, Emmaline followed a young ensign who looked less than thrilled to be there.

"I'll take your things, Lieutenant." The ensign said as soon as they were outside the bridge, "Please take a seat. They were waiting on you."

Emmaline nodded and reluctantly handed her bag to the ensign who quickly made her way towards another part of the ship. Emmaline wondered if she would ever truly see her bag again. She walked into the communications room slash bridge and waited for her eyes to adjust. Behind a war table sat three other individuals. One was an older gentleman with cropped gray hair and hardened eyes. He wore the insignia of the UNSC on his breast pocket but other than that didn't seem like he was an officer.

The second was a short haired African woman whose eyes twinkled with an unheard joke. She looked strong. Much stronger than Emmaline. The third was a Sangheli wearing dark blue armor, his neck craned towards Emmaline. He looked her up and down for a moment before turning back to the people at the table, awaiting Emmaline to sit down, which she did slowly.

"Lieutenant Commander, I presume?" The woman asked in a thick accent, arching an eyebrow.

"That's me." Emmaline responded.

The older man scoffed, "Took your sweet time, did you?"

"I don't understand what you mean, Sir?" She began but the old man held up a hand to stop her.

"Not Sir, I'm afraid. Not anymore. Dr. Reynolds Cooper at your service."

Emmaline's ears perked up at the mention of another doctor, "What do you study, Doctor Cooper?" She asked, genuinely interested.

"Psychology, my dear girl. We are going to get under the hoods of each of the women that have been selected and see what makes them tick. Are they the right fit for someone like the Arbiter?"

"Might I add this is where I come in," The elite at the table spoke, his deep, raspy voice resonating through the room, "Lieutenant Jackson, I have heard so much about you. It is an honor."

"The honor is all mine," She responded, nodding at him.

The Elite's mandibles seemed to turn up in a slight smile, "Of course. The Arbiter has told our kind many things about your kindness and humility."

Emmaline's face turned red. She hated it when other people talked about her, even if it was considered praise. Pursing her lips, she decided not to answer but sit down at the table. "And where is the individual in question?" She asked, looking over at the African woman.

She waved her hand dismissively and smiled warmly at Emmaline, "He is in transit, expected to dock within the hour. We are supposed to go and greet him. Until thenâ€¦" She shrugged and stuck her hand over the table, "I'm Commander Quinn O'Hara."

"It's a pleasure, commander," Emmaline said, taking her hand, gripping it firmly.

"Indeed," Quinn said, her little smile growing wider. She leaned back and handed me a stack of papers, the interested candidates it looked like, "Okay, here are the perspective individualsâ€¦Page one, Sergeant Rachel Maloneâ€¦"

They went through page after page of women who were all vying for this. Penny's page caught Emmaline's interest right off the bat. She looked terrified in her picture, trying to compensate the fear in her eyes with the grin on her face, making her look like a serial killer or an escaped insane asylum patient. She chuckled when she saw it, catching the eyes of the other members of the council.

"Is there something that you find amusing, Lieutenant?" Commander O'Hara asked with an arch of her eyebrow.

Emmaline coughed loudly and shook her head, "No Commander, just had a little bit of something caught in my throat.

Quinn shot her a look that looked like if Emmaline didn't stop, she was going to shove something down her throat and continued on. Several other names caught Emmaline's interest. Sergeant Gwen Hawkins, Corporal Carly Lewis and Lieutenant Linn Bates. All were absolutely stunning with sparkling resumes. These were the ones who wanted to be here. These were the ones who were really competing. The other ones were just dust in the wind.

"All hands involved in the board, please lay to docking bat 3F." A pipe was made and Commander O'Hara looked up, making a face at the piping system. Standing up, they did the same, leaving our papers in a neat little pile so that they could come back to them.

"My brothers are here," The Sangheli, L'sai Jara, mused gleefully, the first one out the door. The three humans followed him, slower. Especially Em. Her heart had just jumped into hyper speed and there was nothing she could do to slow it down. It had been so long since they had seen each other. Did she regret what she did? Oh hell yeah she did. She wondered if he did as well.

\* \* \*

><p><em>They had been working together for nearly a month. She had been putting off leaving to finish some final inscriptions on the tablet they had found on the ring, instructions that would have been helpful. But too little, too late, Emmaline found herself cringing whenever she thought of these directions, thinking of Kyle and his men. Through it all, the Arbiter, Thel, had been with her, directing her hand and picking up where she left off, learning rudimentary words and some phrases. He could swear now in five different languages, including Forerunner. <em>

\_ She was just finishing up for the night taking off her gloves and grabbing her blouse. Thel was leaning back in a swivel chair he had

brought from a different office, watching her work. It was hypnotic in a way. Soft music played in the background and Emmaline looked back, a full on smile etched into her face. She let her guard down when she was with him. He liked that about her. He could see the real Emmaline and that was perfect. She was perfect. \_

\_ A flutter shimmied through his belly, indicating his feelings for her. He couldn't be in love with her. Not after a month of being togetherâ€|That was impossible. If R'tas or the council found out back on Sanghelios, he could possibly be exiled or worseâ€|but it was the way she moved that really caught his attention. When she was in here, speaking six different languages in a cacophony of a tongue all her own, she was at peace. She glanced back at her work, still feeling happy from the passage she had just cracked. That had been giving her problems for about three days and finally getting it had made her warm and bubbly inside. It probably didn't help that she had a bottle of flat beer sitting next to her. While it was frowned down upon to be drinking while working, that never stopped Emmaline from sipping on a drink while she worked. \_

\_ "So," She said, sitting back and cracking her spine, "What do Elites eat?" \_

\_ "We eat what you don't," He said mildly, watching her take her hair out of the stiff bun and run a hand across her skull, shaking out her copper nightmare, becoming gold and red in the bright lights overhead. \_

\_ "That's really specific," She teased, standing up and dropping her beer into the recycling bin. It evaporated quickly and she turned back to Thel, a mischievous grin on her face, "If you won't tell me about what you eat, can you at least tell me about what your planet's like? I've always wanted to go to Sanghelios." She sighed and leaned against the counter, her cheeks red from focusing. \_

\_ He leaned back and sighed softly, "It's beautiful. It's home. Pretend you're seeing your Earth for the first time and tell me what that's like. That's Sanghelios." \_

\_ Emmaline closed her eyes and sighed, "Seeing Earth for the first time was exhilarating. It was those butterflies that you get on the first date times a billion. I couldn't believe it when they sent me back here but they did. I remember when I saw the ocean for the first time in space. My family was from California, I remember that much from my mom's stories growing up." She opened her eyes and looked out the window. Mount Kilimanjaro loomed in the distance, "It's my home, Thel. How else can I really describe it?" \_

\_ He moved over to stand by her, her warmth radiating from her body, "You deserve it, Emmaline." \_

\_ She looked up at him and he managed not to pull her towards him and doâ€|what? Kiss her? He had learned of the human gesture not too long ago. He wanted to kiss her so badly but he couldn't. No, she deserved some strong, brave human, not him. She deserved the Reclaimer, the Master Chief. \_

\_ A pang of guilt raced through his heart and he turned away. "Thel?" Emmaline asked, "What's wrong?" \_

\_ "Nothing that concerns you, I promise." He reassured her, sitting down again. She followed him over, a sweet gesture and placed a hand on his own. \_

\_ "Whatever it is, you can come to me whenever. We're friends and I promise I will listen." She reached forward and gave him a peck on where his cheek might have been but instead kissed a mandible. With a wave and a smile, she walked out of the room, leaving Thel alone to his thoughts. \_

\* \* \*

><p>Emmaline followed the council towards the hangar, every step her heart growing heavier with guilt. She had been dreading this moment since she had been told about her service on The Witching Hour. Biting her lower lip, she felt her stomach twist into knots as she and the rest of the party stopped in front of the hangar doors.<p>

"Sangheli ambassadors aboard," A voice piped as the hiss of a door being unlocked was emitted from the frame. She closed her eyes, trying to fight back the feelings that were rushing through her body, the adrenaline of seeing him again getting the best of him.

She opened them again and watched as several Elites stepped through the opening door. He was in the front, still seven feet tall and still dressed in his Arbiter armor. He was still intimidating as the last time she had seen him, there was no denying that.

"Greetings, Arbiter." Commander O'Hara said with a smile, "Welcome to The Witching Hour. It is an honor to have you hear and to have you taking a bride from our race."

"The pleasure is all mine, Commander," Thel assured her, his eyes flicking towards Emmaline who received a short, curt nod. There was nothing there. Nothing made her heart hurt. He hadn't forgiven her that much was obvious. "Lieutenant Jackson," he said coolly, "It is a pleasure to see you again."

"It's always nice to see an old face, Arbiter." She tried, keeping the tension between them at a minimum. Nobody else needed to know about a past that she hoped was over and done. She had put the guilt inside of a box and had thrown it in the ocean of her memories. She didn't want that box resurfacing, especially now.

They left it at that. The Arbiter followed the group towards the bridge, Commander O'Hara chatting idly about the mission at hand. They would be given a month to help The Arbiter find his bride. Emmaline flicked her eyes up to meet his own amber ones and saw anger flickering behind the acceptance. Why the hell had he asked for her to be on the council?! They hadn't spoken in 5 years and nowâ€|now he wanted to her to help him find a bride? It didn't seem like him but maybe this was payback.

Sitting back down, she kept her eyes on the paperwork on the table in front of her, trying to avoid the fact that Thel had chosen the seat right across from her, the bastard.

"I apologize for the rush but we have to get into this ASAP," Commander O'Hara apologized, "If you would turn your attention to the

first candidate, Sergeant Gwendolyn Hawkinsâ€|"

The interviews began, each woman trying to show off their most flattering attributes. Hawkins certainly had assets, her perfectly almond shaped eyes and full lips smiling all the while. The girl was about as dumb as a bag of rocks though. She might have sounded good on paper but when she opened her mouth, one would wish they had a stapler and a tube of super glue.

"Thank you, Sergeant," Commander O'Hara finally said, "We will notify you when the next group of interviews will be taking place."

This went on for about three hours, each candidate taking about half an hour to complete an interview. When it was Penny's turn, she merely mumbled the entire time, her face as bright as a cherry tomato. Obviously the girl didn't have a forte for public speaking.

Finally, they reached the last woman of the day. She walked in with an aura of confidence and poise. Sergeant Rachel Malone walked in and smiled, nodding at the board.

"Welcome Sergeant Malone," L'sai greeted with a nod. She smiled warmly at the board and settled down in her chair.

"Thank you, Fleet Master," She murmured smoothly. She was absolutely stunning with cropped black hair and lightning green eyes that flashed against her skin, "And may I say what an honor it is to be meeting one of the saviors of the galaxy? Thank you for everything you did, Arbiter."

"Flattery will get you nowhere here, honey." Emmaline spat, taking a sip of her water. Malone's eyes narrowed as she turned them to meet Emmaline's.

"Watch yourself, Jackson." O'Hara snapped.

"I'm sorry; I don't think we've met. You areâ€|?"

"Lieutenant Commander Emmaline Jackson," She responded coolly, "Tell the board a little about yourself, Sergeant."

She smiled and looked around the table, "I was born on Reach. I had family there until they passed during the glassing of the planet." She closed her eyes in remembrance, "I joined the UNSC two years prior to that and fell in love with my job. I served with Master Chief Sierra-117 on the second ring and came back and fought in New Mombasa." She opened them again, "I am a go-getter and a confidant woman."

Dr. Cooper jotted some notes down, "Any history of mental illness in your family, my dear?"

She shook her head, "None that I know of. My family owned a ranch on Reach and I worked on that a lot of the time. I know how to be a hard worker."

"Tell me Sergeant Malone," Thel finally spoke up, "What do you think of me?"

She looked over at him and gave him another heartwarming smile that made Emmaline feel like she was going to be sick, "I think you're a hero. You're brave and wise and courageous for standing up to your own peers when you and the rest of the Elites broke away from the Covenant."

Thel nodded and his mandibles turned up into a sort of smile, "Thank you for those kind words, Sergeant."

"Please, you can call me Rachel." She responded, still smiling.

Emmaline rolled her eyes and found her eyes catching the clock. They had been in here for nearly 8 hours. She was so over this. She still wasn't sure why he wanted her to sit on him playing Bachelor, especially when Sergeant Pretty Pants was sitting right across from her smiling at him like he was the fucking cat's pajamas. He was an ELITE or did everyone forget that they tried to kill them as well? Not like the thought had ever stopped her.

This continued on in the current fashion until Commander O'Hara waved a dismissive hand, "You are free to go," She said with a smile, "We will contact you in 24 hours to let you know when the next interview will be held. Thank you for your time, Sergeant."

"Thank you for your consideration, Commander." She replied before standing up and exiting the room.

The rest of the board began to stand up, Dr. Cooper and L'sai began to talk in hushed tones while Thel stood up, walking away from the table. Emmaline stood quickly and turned to follow, only approaching him when she knew that they were out of earshot from any other of the board members.

"Hey!" She called down the hallway. Nobody else was there, either in their racks or in other parts of the ship. Time was hard to tell in space. Thel turned around, his amber eyes locking onto her own hazel ones.

"Lieutenant, you should use a different tone with me," He warned her dangerously. She approached him, not heeding the warning.

"What the hell am I to you?!"

"You are my friend and my confidant; that is why you are here." He said nonchalantly. Emmaline narrowed her eyes and stormed up to him, trying to glare into his eyes.

"No. I'm here so that you feel better about yourself! You wanted me to be on your stupid board so that I would learn that you can go on without me, isn't that right?"

With an angry huff, Thel stepped forward, pinning Emmaline between his armored chest and the wall. "You need to stop thinking you're the center of the universe, Emmaline Jackson." He growled, "You are nothing to me. I wanted you here to use as a comparison, nothing more. We are not friends, we are not acquaintances. I won't make the same mistakes twice, I assure you of that. If you approach me again like this, I will have one of my men speak to you and they do not take as kindly to human insolence as I do, do you understand



me?"

Emmaline puffed out her chest, her ears hot and her face even hotter, "I understand you completely, Arbiter. I also understand I'm not going to be here when the council meets again tomorrow. You can consider me AWOL. I won't sit around and be abused like this."

"Very well, be a child."

"Fine! I will! Didn't bother you before, did it?"

Thel looked like he was going to say something else but then turned and started walking down the hall without another word. Emmaline's temper flared and she wanted to follow him, hurt him, make him pay for the words he had slipped between the cracks of her ice castle. She watched him walk down the hallway, wishing with all her heart that he would turn around and rush at her, taking her in his arms and tangling his mandibles in her hair like he had done before.

No, he wouldn't turn around. He was a hero and she was just another casualty of his actions.

He was just a survivor of hers.

\* \* \*

><p>-UNSC Headquarters-<p>

-0100 hours-

"â€|Cortana...Siera-117â€|Mayday, maydayâ€|Forward Unto Dawnâ€|" The message was garbled, unclear but the corpsman's heart leapt up to her throat when she heard it. She waved over her superior officer and the commander of the Operations center wandered over.

"Private, what's wrong?" He asked, arching an eyebrow.

"Sir, I just heard a transmission," She pulled it back up and replayed it. His eyebrows shot up to his hairline and he turned on his heel and practically ran towards the communicator.

"Who would you like to contact, Commander?" The female's smooth voice asked, the man's stomach already twisting in knots.

"Lord Reynolds," he said before it switched to a man who was sleeping on his desk, his drool seeping into a pile of papers on his desk.

"Sir!" Commander Beckett yelled at the hologram. The man stirred and he looked up, blinking his bleary eyes to try and focus on the officer.

"Beckett, this had better be important," Lord Reynolds murmured, rubbing his stubbly face. He had replaced Lord Hood almost a year ago after the unfortunate demise of the older Commandant of the UNSC.

"It is, Sir. We've found him."

Reynolds jumped up like he had been prodded with an electrical rod,

"Are you sure?!"

"It came from his AI, Sir, Cortana," He explained excitedly, "If we can pinpoint the locationâ€¦!"

"We can bring him back." Reynolds finished, already picking up the phone to make some important phone calls.

Master Chief, the Reclaimer, was coming home.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Hey guys! Welcome once again to LMYH. Hopefully you're enjoying the rewrite because I have been adamant to get it done! It's really been a ton of fun to come back and redo something that I thought was a masterpiece. There's a lot more information, more motivation and constipation! (I kid, I kid) I'm so glad that most of you are enjoying it! I'd love to hear any feedback you could give me, it means the universe to me! <strong>

\*\*Anyway, different sort of relationship between Emmaline and Thel. I really like the idea of a past romance and the whole jaded lover thing. You'll learn more about it as time goes on...WITH SMUT! Gah. There is going to be twice the smut and twice the explosions of awesomeness in this one! \*\*

\*\*Let me know what you think! Critiques are awesome, comments are awesome, praise is awesome.\*\*

\*\*Trying to hide the fro-yo, \*\*  
><strong>Queenie <strong>

\*\*Halo (c) 343 Industries, Microsoft\*\*  
><strong>Emmaline Jackson (c) The Queen of Asgard<strong>

><strong>Lyrics-"Just a Dream" <strong>

#### 4. Homecoming Interrupted

\_ Say something, I'm giving up on you, \_  
><em>I'll be the one, if you want me to, <em>  
><em>Anywhere I, would have followed you, <em>  
><em>Say something I'n giving up on you!<em>

\* \* \*

><p>"Reveille, reveille," The voice chimed over The Witching Hour, rousing Emmaline out of her deep slumber. She rubbed her eyes and sat up, not used to getting up at the butt crack ofâ€¦Oh shit, that was right. She was in space and she was going to tell that council what for. She was done. She wasn't going to sit around here and be tortured by the guilt that was eating her from the inside out. She dressed her and pulled her hair back in her infamous French twist before blousing her boots and walking from her tiny stateroom.<p>

"All hands lay to the conference room for briefing," Another voice echoed over the ship as Emmaline began to walk down the hallway. She glanced down the passage and saw a group of 30 or so people walking

towards her, mostly just E-3's and 4's. They spoke idly and in excited tones of voice.

"What's going on?" Emmaline asked, falling into step with them. One of the taller guys grinned at her and winked.

"They found him, Lieutenant Commander," He said as if that cleared everything up. Emmaline arched an eyebrow and waved her hand for him to continue. He rolled his eyes good naturedly and then clarified, "They found the Master Chief!"

Emmaline felt as if she had been struck by lightning. The hero of the Covenant War and Earth, she had admired him albeit had never met him. Thel had told her so much about him, even though they had worked together less than three days. He admitted to feeling guilty to leaving him behind but what more could he have done?

Emmaline followed the masses to the conference room, a larger part of the ship that was able to house every single member of the crew—plus a few extras. Emmaline stood up while Captain Cobb addressed her crew, shaking her short, dark red hair out of her face. Leaning against the door frame, she ignored Thel when he walked in, the two not even making eye contact.

"You okay, Jackson?" Commander O'Hara asked suddenly, coming around the corner. Emmaline jumped at the sound of her rich voice and then nodded in conformation.

"Yeah, just not used to getting up this early. Hey, can we talk about something?"

"Sure. What's up?"

Emmaline bit her lip, "I don't think me being on Thel's board is really good for me or him. I'm probably just causing a bigger problem by being here than I am by actually sitting in on these sorts of things. Look, the reason is—"

"Can you hold that thought, Jackson?" O'Hara murmured distractedly, "Did you hear about what happened?"

"The Master Chief? Yeah, that's amazing," She admitted, brushing something off her blouse, "But seriously though Commander—"

"Lieutenant Jackson, is there something you want to address with the crew?" Cobb asked coldly. She felt 100 pairs of eyes turn to her and a mad blush crept up her cheeks.

"No, Captain." She muttered, turning her own eyes downwards.

"I didn't think so. Now, I was contacted by Lord Reynolds about three hours ago and they want to send several ships if need be to the last known position of Master Chief Sierra-117. The Witching Hour has been—"

She didn't even need to finish. Once she said Witching Hour, the crew broke out into excited whispering. Finally, a real mission! "LET ME FINISH!" Cobb roared over the cacophony of voices, "Now, as I was saying, we are assigned as the first ship in the area. We will scout

out and see what we can find. That is uncharted space so we will proceed with caution." She turned her head to address the entire crew, "This isn't a time to be a hero, people. Do your assigned duties and we'll all come out of this in one piece, do you understand me?"

"Yes, Captain Cobb!" 100 voices chimed. The captain smirked and nodded.

"Good, I'm glad we've come to common ground. Supply ships will be arriving within an hour and final prep work for getting underway will begin at 0600 tomorrow morning. All hands will help with final preparation and the board will be postponed until we return. That is all. Turn to duties."

Emmaline's heart sank in her chest as men and women got up, talking excitedly amongst themselves. She couldn't believe it. They were the ship that was going to be the one to bring home the Master Chief. She was going to be stuck with him unless

"Captain!" Emmaline called, crossing the threshold of the conference hall, fighting the waves of people who walked against her. The tall woman turned around and smiled coolly at Emmaline.

"Yes Lieutenant Commander, what is it?" She asked in her quipped voice. Emmaline cleared her throat and stood at attention.

"We need to talk."

\* \* \*

><p><em>Emmaline stumbled back into the base, tears rushing down her cheeks. She could barely walk in a straight line and her mouth tasted like old pennies. She hated being drunk. How the fuck did they manage to get 14 shots of Jaeger down her throat?! She HATED Jaeger! On top of that, they began to tease her about Thel, how much time she had been spending with The Arbiter and that led to Kyle which turned the teasing into accusations. Was she sleeping with The Arbiter?! God, no! Would she if she got the chance? That was none of their goddamned business. Did she actually sympathize with the split chins?! God forbid that she did. Even though the war was over, that didn't mean that hostilities didn't exist between both parties. <em>

\_She bit back another sob as she kept her head to the floor running into someone. "'Scuse me," She mumbled, trying to push past the person. \_

\_"Emmaline?" The deep, masculine voice caught her ear and she looked up into the warm, almost concerned amber eyes of The Arbiter HER Arbiter. Wait, where the hell had that thought come from?! "What in the name of the Forerunners have you been doing? Why are you weeping?" \_

\_"I'm sorry I'm a little drunkâ€" She managed to say, hiccupping slightly, "Can you just take me back to my room, please?" \_

\_"It would be my pleasure." He took her firmly by the shoulders and steered her back towards her room. The halls were dark at this time of night, everyone either at the small bar or sleeping. "Who did this to you?" \_

\_ "Myself," She snorted and winced slightly, her knees buckling underneath her. Thel knew she was about to go down and quickly swept her into his arms bridal style and held her close to his chest. She reeked of alcohol and tears, a thick musk that hit his nose with such a force he had to take a step back. "Thel?" \_

\_ "Yes?" \_

\_ "Do you sleep in your armor?" She asked softly, tracing her nimble fingers over the patterns in the metal plating, her fingers sometime finding bare flesh. Each time her fingers touched him, electricity sparked through his body. \_

\_ "No, Emmaline. I do not sleep in my armor." \_

\_ "Then how do you sleep?" She asked, her fingers finding his neck instead. He had to focus on taking one step at a time instead of her running her butterfly soft digits across his skin. \_

\_ "The Sangheli wear something that is similar to your loincloth or we sleep in the nude." \_

\_ She snorted again, "You sleep naked? That's funny, I can't imagine you naked. Well, I can butâ€¦" \_

\_ "You're intoxicated, Emmaline," Thel chided, the female dropping her hand from his neck, "Maybe we should talk about this tomorrow." \_

\_

\_ She sighed and reached up to place her soft lips against the base of his neck, "Do you love me?" \_

\_ He stopped. Had she figure it out? She must have. She sighed again and snuggled into his arms, "It's okay if you do." \_

\_ She had stopped crying by the time they reached her room. He opened the door and helped her walk into her state room. It was small and sparsely furnished but it was clean and smelled like her. "I think I might love you too. I'm not sure but Kyleâ€¦" Her face crumpled when she said his name. Thel had never seen a human like this before and imagined he would never see one that had been so dejectedâ€¦so degradedâ€¦especially his ice queen, "Oh God, Thel. I don't know what he would want! Maybe I didn't know him as well as I thought I didâ€¦" \_

\_

\_ "Quiet now, Emmaline," Thel murmured, helping her slide into bed. Before he could react, she reached up and placed her soft lips against his lower left mandible. The gesture would have been innocent if he hadn't felt her lips linger there like an untold story, strong and unyielding. \_

\_ "Thelâ€¦" She whispered, pulling away slightly. He could smell the heady arousal coming from her body and that made his resolve weaken just that much more, "Will you stay here with me tonight?" \_

\_ Thel knew it was wrong to stay. She was drunk and that would mean she might say things she didn't mean. He meant everything he would say and she wouldn't even remember it. But her words were there, tumbling from alcohol soaked cavities in her mind, writing etched

into his own cranium. How could he forget the words that had come from her mouth? "I think I might love you too!" \_

\_Dare he tumble into her arms and allow her human nature to wash over him in wave upon wave of unconditional passion? Or did he just blow it off and continue to pine after her, never to truly tell her what he wanted to. Forerunners above, how badly he wanted to tell her that he loved her. The next moment took his question and threw it out the window. \_

\_She wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled him down onto the bed, her drunken fingers prying at his armor. He pushed them away softly and helped her remove the helmet, the metal flying across the room as he gave into her. \_

\_It was awkward and she passed out about halfway through, the two of them not knowing what to do with the other's body. Plus, she had burst into tears about a quarter of the way of herself undressing, muttering some more about Kyle. Thel found her form to be pleasing, her body all curves and dips. He wished he could have explored her body more but once she passed out, he didn't want to be blamed for anything. Quickly gathering up his discarded armor, he made sure that the hallway was clear and hurried towards his own quarters, wondering what tomorrow would bring.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Emmaline found herself in the gym in front of a punching bag. It kept her mind off of things. When she had been cut from the cheerleading team her sophomore year (mostly her sister's fault) she decided to try kickboxing. What she didn't know was that she was a natural, dodging and kicking into the state championships in her senior year.<p>

BOOM! Her fist connected with the sand-filled bag. Thel Vadam.

CRACK! Sergeant Rachel Malone.

SMASH! Captain Cobb and her biting words.

Her fist connected one more time and she gritted her teeth, imagining faces of those who had wronged her. Those who had pissed her off. She felt like she could hit the bag until either her fingers were nothing but shattered glass or she fell over from exhaustion. Cobb had said no to her returning to Earth. She gave Em a small smile and told her that they needed everyone on this mission...including her.

She had tried to tell Cobb that she would be useless but Cobb would hear none of it, waving her off. \_"You'll get off this ship once we find The Master Chief."\_ She had said, walking away to deal with some more pressing matters. Emmaline closed her eyes and sighed.

"Lieutenant Commander?" A voice called from behind her and Emmaline whipped her head around to see Sergeant Malone standing there, her mouth smiling but her eyes swirling with disdain, "I'm sorry, I thought that was you."

"It's definitely me," Emmaline muttered snidely, still kicking and

hitting at the bag. She really didn't want to talk to Malone right now.

"Lieutenant, do you mind asking you a question?"

"Yeah."

Malone blew off this last response and continued on anyway, "Why do you not like me? You were very hostile to me yesterday and I didn't appreciate it. I want you to apologize."

Emmaline whirled around and nearly hit Malone square in the face, "Are you serious?! You want me to apologize to you?" She could barely believe what she had just heard.

"Yeah, I do."

Emmaline took a step forward and shoved her sweaty hair back from her face, "Look Malone. I'm not going to apologize for something that I shouldn't have to. And I didn't do anything to you. I asked you some firm questions and you answered them. I'm going into this with a hardened heart already so just knock your victim act off and let me work out in peace!"

Malone narrowed her eyes and scoffed, "God, is it so hard for you to apologize?! I didn't even do anything to you!" Suddenly, something dawned within her and Emmaline knew she had figured it out, "You and The Arbiter have history, don't you?! And you're still in love with him!"

"Ha! We have history but he was the one in love with me." Emmaline scoffed, still glaring at the blonde Sergeant, "It's history, sweetie but I think that he deserves way better than the likes of someone like you."

Malone shook her head and turned on her heel, walking away, "I still want that apology, Jackson. You don't know me and you're not going toâ€¦until I become the Arbiter's wife that is!"

Emmaline's blood rang in her ears as she heard Malone's footsteps fade away. Her body shook and she shrank back against the wall, putting her knees up to her chest, watching the other side of the gym for a long time, thinking about what had happened between them.

\* \* \*

><p><em>"Emmaline!" <em>

\_She looked back to see Thel running towards her. She couldn't remember last night at all but she found herself back in her room, completely naked with a mighty awful hangover. For some reason, guilt was pitted in her stomach and seeing The Arbiter made her feel even worse. \_

\_"Ohâ€¦hey Thel," She greeted, clutching the piece of paper in her hand, "How are you today?" \_

\_"I heard you've gotten discharged," He said, cutting straight to the chase, "And you are free to go anywhere you choose." \_

\_She gave him a slight smile. "Yeah. I'm thinking about going home and spending some time with my family. And you're leaving for Sanghelios soon, I heard. In two days' time? Do you have someone waiting for you?" \_

\_Thel shook his head, "No, but I wanted to ask you a question. Do you remember last night at all?"\_

\_Emmaline froze. Had she done something with Thel? Oh gods above, please tell her she didn't have drunken sex with the freaking Arbiter of the Covenant! Her face turned red when she thought about the idea. "Kind of! What happened?" \_

\_"You professed your love for me, Emmaline. You gave yourself to me but you fell asleep before we could consummate between us." He explained, "Emmaline, I want you to come to Sanghelios with me. I don't care if you study or learn but come to Sanghelios and be with me. I want to show you what my world is like. I am in love with you and I believe you love me too." Thel watched her hopefully, warmth and hope dancing in his eyes. \_

\_Emmaline's stomach fell to her shoes. "Thel!" Biting her lip, she turned her eyes to her shoes, "I don't think this is the right time, so soon after the war and whatnot. I have feelings for you but I don't quite know what they are yet. I can't go with you and I can't tell you that I love you." She looked up and he could see that her eyes glittered with unshed tears, "I am so, so sorry that I did that. I am sorry that I can't be with you. I'm sorry I don't love you."

\_

\_Thel bristled at her words and looked over her head, "I! Understand," The words were harsh and brittle and they shot daggers of poison into Emmaline's exposed veins. She wanted to cry but tears wouldn't fall. She wanted to scream and jump up and down and tell him that she was so sorry but she couldn't. Emotions bubbled under the surface of her skin, threatening to burst but she hid them, "I too am sorry, Lieutenant Jackson." \_

\_"You have nothing!" She began but when she looked back up, he was gone, already walking across the field towards the main base. Emmaline knew that at that point, everything had changed. She allowed the tears to fall as he walked away. \_

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Two flashbacks in one?! Okay, so maybe I wanted to explain some things a little differently...maybe, get the ball rolling? Finish up on these past things with Em and Thel? Maybe...just maybe...<strong>

\*\*Okay, also, I think it's fair for people who may be a little confused. In my mind, sex in the Sangheli culture is basically the ultimate way to say "I love you" and even a drunk half attempt at sex is considered feelings for the other, even marriage. Sangheli females are expected to lose their "virginity" on their wedding night or on the evening of their betrothing. Depends on the situation. Men are the same way. All have a life partner which is the equivalent of a spouse. Infidelity is punishable by death so unless your partner dies, you are forbidden to fool around. \*\*



**\*\*Just an idea I came up with so you would understand the cultural barriers between the two of them and you now realize why Thel hasn't forgiven her. Just some food for thought. \*\***

**\*\*Anywhoo, thanks to my two anon guests for reviewing and as incentive for you guys, the 250th reviewer gets a cameo as a Marine in the next chapter! (Just a little something that should entice!)**  
**\*\***

**\*\*Thanks for reading!\*\***

**\*\*Queenie\*\***

**\*\*Halo (c) 343 Industries, Microsoft\*\***  
**><strong>Emmaline (c) The Queen of Asgard<strong>**  
**><strong>"Say Something"-A Great Big World <strong>**

## 5. To be Hated or Loved

Emmaline finished brushing her teeth, watching the water swirl in the basin and down the drain, feeling empty. They had continued on with the interviews while the rest of the ship got ready around them. Malone and Emmaline glared at each other every single time she was being interviewed and Emmaline didn't try and talk to Thel again. She knew that there was just too much history between the two to deal with that but he caught her looking. She caught him as well. She didn't really know what to feel about him anymore.

"Commander?"

She turned around to see a younger marine standing in the doorway, saluting. Emmaline saluted back and arched an eyebrow, cocking her head slightly. She looked at the woman's uniform and saw the name Guerrero stitched above the pocket.

"Can I help you, Private?"

She dropped the salute and cleared her throat, "Uh, I just received word from Captain Cobb that they're getting ready to jump and if you could join her on the bridge she asked to fetch you. She didn't think it polite to pipe you or anything, what with you being an officer."

Emmaline nodded and followed the private into the hallway, passing several people in her wake.

"Are you from the bridge?" Emmaline asked, wondering why Cobb had sent a private to deal with her.

"Yup. I'm a break in Operations Specialist. I handle most of the radio comms and incoming messaging. I also work pretty closely with the ship's AI, Apollo."

"I don't think I've met Apollo yet," Emmaline admitted, following the girl towards the bridge.

"He's pretty stupid for an AI."

"I heard that, Lucia."

The girl grinned sheepishly as a man's form appeared on the platform closest to them. He was tall, wearing a pair of glasses and had a full on beard. He also wore a sharp suit and seemed to be glaring at them. "Apollo, meet Lieutenant Commander Jackson."

He flicked his eyes to Emmaline and gave her a once over, "Pleasure, Commander."

"Yeah, you too," She muttered, keeping her brow furrowed. He turned back to Guerrero and scowled.

"What was that about me being stupid? Do I need to put an alcohol incident on your record, young lady?"

Her eyes widened and she shook her head quickly, "Okay, okay! I'm sorry Apollo!"

He cleared his throat, a twinkle in his eye, "Maybe next time you'll consider what you say before you say it, eh Miss Lucia?"

"Er, yes. Again, I'm sorry. I didn't realize you were listening."

He chuckled and turned back to Emmaline, "I apologize I didn't introduce myself earlier but I've been busy running schematic tests for The Witching Hour."

"It's not a problem. I've been busy." She lied, rubbing her pant fabric between thumb and forefinger. In truth, she had felt uneasy and rather awkward since she had boarded The Witching Hour. The only thing she had to her name was the ice walls that she had reinforced since her last conflict with the Arbiter. There was no chance of holes now.

"Well then, shall we?" Guerrero nodded and smiled, catching Emmaline's attention.

"Yeah, sure. Let's get going."

The two continued through the corridors, avoiding excited marines who chatted aimlessly amongst themselves, saluting when they felt it was necessary. Guerrero explained her entire life story and Emmaline fought back the urge to tell the private to shut her trap. But Emmaline felt like she didn't need another enemy on the ship so she decided to keep her own mouth closed as Guerrero yammered on.

"Here we are!" She said brightly, the bridge opening up. Captain Cobb stood at the observation platform and looked out over the stars. Guerrero saluted sharply, "Captain Cobb, I found Commander Jackson as requested."

The captain turned around and nodded at the young woman, "Thank you, Guerrero. Return to your station and begin making preparations to leave controlled space."

She saluted again, "Aye, aye Captain! It was nice to meet you, Commander. I hope we get to talk again soon."

Emmaline nodded and then turned her gaze back to the captain, "You wanted to see me, Ma'am?"

Cobb gave her a wry smile and then pointed to the inky blackness in front of them, "Did you ever meet the Master Chief?"

"That's a negative, Ma'am. My late husband served with him on the first Halo ring."

"Do you mind me asking what happened?"

Emmaline bit her lip, "Uh, I guess not. He was attacked by the Flood. He and the rest of his squad were decimated. At first they told me a Covenant battalion had taken him out but when the Flood landed on Earthâ€¦" She stopped, still gnawing on her lower lip, like she did whenever she talked about Kyle.

"I see."

"With all due respect, Ma'am, did you call me up here for a reason or did you just want to talk because I'm sure you have far more important details to hash out with your crewâ€¦"

Cobb put a light hand on Emmaline's arm and turned her gaze to meet Emmaline's own. She had never noticed the captain had one blue eye and one brown eye but her gaze was strong and confident, "Yes, actually, there was a reason I called you up here. I noticedâ€¦well, I didn't notice but Lieutenant Winters told me that you and Sergeant Malone may or may not be seeing eye to eye on this whole Arbiter marriage thing. Now, I've been in the UNSC for quite some time, Commander and if there is one thing that I cannot stand seeing is my crew not working like a team."

Emmaline made a mental note to strangle Penny later, "So this is what I want from you, Commander. I want you and Malone to work out whatever problems you've got and get the fuck over yourself. Whatever you have to do it, do it. But I can't have trivial matters like that fucking with my crew, got it?"

"Erâ€¦yes Ma'amâ€¦" Emmaline said with furrowed brow, "Request permission to return to the medical bay."

Cobb nodded and Emmaline turned on her heel to march back to where she had found some temporary solace, "Oh, and Emmaline?"

She turned back around to see Cobb's back turned to her, "Watch your back. Malone has far more friends on this ship than you do."

"Roger that, Captain."

Emmaline walked off the bridge and stormed through the corridors, her ears burning. She didn't even bother returning the half assed salutes thrown up while she passed. Finally, the door opened to the medical bay and Emmaline stormed over to where she had last seen Penny.

"Lieutenant Winters!" She roared, the door to her office swinging open. Instantly, the redheaded lieutenant was on her feet and at attention, "What the hell are you trying to play here?!"

"Uhâ€¦I don't understand what you mean, Commander Jackson!"

Emmaline was fuming, "How DARE you go to the Captain about something as trivial as Malone and I! That was and still is, none of your goddamned business!"

"I'm so sorry, Commander, she just asked me about you two and I literally have likeâ€|two filters on my mouthâ€|" The poor girl looked like she was about to cry but Emmaline just kept plowing forward.

"I don't need the captain on my ass, I already have a fucking Sangheli hit squad ready to take me out at a moment's notice!" She snapped angrily, her heart beating in her ears. Finally, she took a deep breath and ran her hands over her pulled back hair, "Okay, I'm sorry Penny. I didn't mean to lose my temper like thatâ€|"

The waterworks started. Penny pushed Emmaline against the wall and raced from the room, tears streaking her cheeks. "Oh noâ€|Lieutenant, come back!"

At that very moment, O'Hara entered the med bay and witnessed the teary eyed young woman rush out of the bay. She whipped her head towards Emmaline and shot her a look that would make Hell freeze over. "What the fuck did you do?!"

"I didn'tâ€|" Emmaline deflated and instantly, a guilty feeling wriggled its way into her stomach, making her feel queasy. "Oh my god. I fucked up."

"Yeah, I'd say you did. You know, when we invited you to be a part of this panel, we expected a mature, military trained woman, not some bitch that we could have pulled out of a local high school. Get your head out of your ass, Jackson." With that, O'Hara turned on her heel and stormed out of the room. Emmaline collapsed onto a wheelie chair and put her head in her hands in embarrassment. The walls around her heart were shattering. She felt awful.

"All hands turn to assigned tasks for subspace jump." Guerrero's voice rang across the ship and Emmaline slunk over to her assigned seating to await the jump. She was situated between O'Hara and Penny, neither sitting in their assigned seats. Miserably, Emmaline wallowed in self-pity as the countdown began. They hated her. It was all her fault for being so bitchy. If only she hadn't agreed to be a part of the stupid council she could be home right now, watching some stupid movie on TV with a pint of ice cream.

The familiar buzz of the subspace jump stirred Emmaline out of her thoughts as a new voice warbled across the ship, "Subspace jump activated. Current estimated time of arrival, five days. All hands turn to cryo sleep."

Emmaline pulled herself out of her chair and found herself in an empty hallway. Only a skeleton crew would be manning The Witching Hour until they reached the planetâ€|maybe Emmaline would join the ranks of the undead for a few days. She detested the idea of going into cryo and so she found herself occupying the med bay for a little longer. She wondered if Penny and O'Hara would go into cryo. Maybe after a few days, they would forgive her for being a 14 year old girl. She chuckled at the idea, pawing through a data pad. She pulled up some research on Forerunners and contemplated finishing up some more decryptions of the tablet back at Janus Industries. She sighed

and closed her eyes, wondering if she could ever make it through this expedition without wanting to murder someone.

"Commander," A voice greeted her and she opened her eyes to see Penny standing at the door of the cubicle, her eyes still puffy, and "Can we talk?"

Emmaline put down the data pad and wheeled around, "Of course. Look, I owe you a huge apology for blowing up on you like that. I mean, that was super bitchy of me and you didn't deserve itâ€|"

She sat down next to Emmaline, "Apology accepted." The two settled into an uncomfortable silence until Penny spoke, "Can you teach me more Sangheli?"

Emmaline felt her ice castle melt just a little more for the girl and she smiled slightly, pulling up some basic Sangheli on the data pad. After some time, Emmaline glanced at the clock, "Are you going into cryo?"

Penny shook her head and wrinkled her nose, "Not my cup of tea. I thought I could do some sparring. Maybe get to know the Arbiter a little more. I mean, I'm still in the running to be his brideâ€|"

Emmaline's stomach churned a little bit at the idea, "Yeahâ€|I forgot about that for a few minutes."

Penny rolled her eyes, "They're serving a late lunch, if you want to come to the galley."

"I'll pass. You go on for me. I'm going to go to the gym and box a little. I could also use a sparring partner. You interested?"

Penny nodded slightly, "Yeah, I'll meet you at 1930, okay?"

"It's a date."

She snorted loudly, "A date. Right. I haven't had one of those in forever." She stood up and brushed off her uniform, "I'll talk to you later, Commander."

"I guess, if you want you can call me Emmaline."

"What about Emma? Emmy? Em?"

"Now you're pushing it."

Penny gave her a slight bow and then waved, turning to leave the room. Emmaline watched her go and then returned to her own room, changing into her workout gear. She was looking forward to working out the stress that the day had brought.

The gym was empty, no surprises there and so she dropped her towel and instantly began to smash her fists against a sandbag. She wished that she could hit harder, silently punishing her bruised knuckles for the grief she had caused that day.

"I expected you to be in cryo."

She whipped around and was surprised to see Thel standing on the other side of the gym, watching her suspiciously. She blew a tuft of hair out her face and glared.

"You know how I feel about cryo. I think I explained that pretty well during our month tryst. Besides, I thought you weren't talking to me."

His mandibles turned up in a sneer, "So, that's what you're calling it now? A tryst?"

She turned back to the sandbag and started pummeling it again, "Yeah. What do you call it?"

"A mistake."

Emmaline stopped hitting the bag and whipped around, her eyes boring into the Arbiter's, "Ouch, my pride." She snapped sarcastically. In truth, the jab had hurt but she had heard worse from him. She could imagine he had far more to say about their little fling. They stood there in a frozen silence for a few moments before Thel grabbed two sparring sticks from a barrel in the corner and tossed it to her. She caught it silently and then weighed it to make sure it was the correct weight and length for her body. To her annoyance, he had gotten it perfect.

"Oh, so what? Are we sparring?" She spat, swinging the stick a few times.

"You once called it dancing," Thel said, side stepping to line up across from her, "Let's see how well you remember our tango, Emmaline Jackson."

"Petty words, Arbiter," She smirked, "I can dance just as well as the next girlâ€|better than Malone, that's for sure."

"Don't be so sure, Jackson. She can fight unlike any other human woman I have ever encountered." She knew he was doing this on purpose. He was finding the chinks in her armor, trying to make her lose her focus. His words bounced off an icy wall and she rolled her eyes.

"Don't try and defend her, Thel."

She barely had time to slam her stick in front of her, her feet sliding against the cold mats as Thel's stick crashed into hers. "I'm not defending her." He took a step back and then returned to a fighting stance, "I'm only speaking the truth."

Emmaline narrowed her eyes and pursed her lips, "A truth that is about to become a lie. I hope you're ready." She too struck a pose and the fight began. Thel moved as she expected. He had never been the best at hand to hand combat, but he was stronger than her and even with her blocking, she was thrown back. She sprung back, her nimble limbs quickly ducking as he swung the baton over her head before bringing his elbow down onto her spine. It hurt but it would hurt her pride far more if she lost this spar.

She managed to hit Thel's knee with her own stick and then ducked from his grip, rolling away. Their eyes met and the next attack

began. Emmaline swung low but then hooked her stick to strike the back of his knee. Thel managed to sidestep her and brought his baton down to strike her again. Emmaline threw her baton up and was forced to a knee.

"She gave me much more of a fight than this," He taunted, finally seeing Emmaline's eyes light up with hatred for Miss Rachel Malone. She pushed him away and came in on the offense, striking at any flesh she could reach, a whirlwind in her own right. Thel began to truly fight, his blows becoming more sporadic and untimed. She was better than he remembered and that made him nervous. He also knew that if he lost, he would never hear the end of it.

He became lost in thought, each movement surprising him. Suddenly, he felt the stick between his feet and he was tripped, landing on his back. Emmaline was there, pointing the baton at his face, her face red and sweaty. He could tell he had landed a good blow on her cheek, the side of her face already red and swollen.

"You can tell Malone," Emmaline murmured dangerously, "That if she wants a fight, she can come and get it."

Her heart beat loudly in her chest, fluttering against her chest like an imprisoned bird. Her stomach was in knots and she could hardly believe what she was doing. Suddenly, hands were brushing against each other, walls temporarily crumbling, their fight turning into a flurry of awkwardness. His fingers fluttered over her ass while her fingers became glued to his chest, her cheeks red and her eyes screaming something he had only seen in her when she was drunkâ€|lust. By the ancestors, he wished he could claim her right there but there were so many unknownsâ€|so many missing moments between the two.

Her love flared in that moment, feeling his body so electrical underneath hers. For a moment, it was all right, him underneath her, her limbs flush against his chest. She could feel her heart crashing through her body now, freeing itself from its cage. God, she was so angry with herself for feeling this way, for the helplessness that coursed through her bodyâ€|Suddenly, anger overcame whatever the secondary feeling was and she instantly rolled off of him, the flush now embarrassment than desire.

"I'm sorry," She said quickly, "That was uncalled for." She stood up and offered her hand to the Arbiter, "I just had so much I wanted to get off my chestâ€|"

He refused her help and stood up as well, "I allowed myself to get carried away. I too apologize, Emmaline."

She quickly turned and grabbed her towel, "However, if you ever get tired of Malone, let me know. I'll come and spar with you again. It wasâ€|" She struggled for the word, "Fun."

"I will let you know if ever the opportunity arises," He said stiffly before turning and walking from the gym. Emmaline sighed and leaned up against the wall, barely believing what she had almost gotten herself into. The anger was still there, seething and bubbling but it was more at herself than anyone.

She had been right there, staring down at him, the fucking split

faced bastard. That stupid split facedâ€|haughtyâ€|perfectâ€|

"Oh no," She groaned, running the back of her hand across her sweaty forehead, dreading the feelings that were sprouting. She had already known there to be feelings. But now, she knew them to be true. The feeling came crashing over her like a great tsunami, hitting her square over the head like a ton of bricks.

Emmaline Jackson was completely, hopelessly and utterly in love with the Arbiter and there was nothing she could do to stop it.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Guess who wrote a new chapter?! Oh yeah, this lady! After a multitude of PMs from people asking me when this story was going to be updated, here is your answer! Right this very moment! I struggled with this chapter quite a bit but I decided it was time for a little bit of stuff between her and Thel...mostly because it amuses me to see their adorable awkwardness. (Also, there are a ton of girls in this story, I've decided but there will be far more manly men in the future because it's Halo people! Also, has everyone seen the trailer for Halo: Nightfall?! OH MY GOD IT LOOKS AMAZING!) <strong>

\*\*Thanks to everyone who's been reviewing and readding the story to their favorites and following it! You guys are awesome! Please keep the ideas coming! There's more on the way! \*\*

\*\*Needing to pee badly, \*\*  
><strong>Queenie<strong>

\*\*Halo (c) 343 Industries \*\*  
><strong>Emmaline (c) The Queen of Asgard<strong>

## 6. Fight to the Death

The days that passed were some of the longest in Emmaline's life. She didn't spar nor did she attempt to see the Arbiter. Instead, she hid behind bookshelves and computers, keeping to herself as much as she possibly could. Their time in slipspace was wearing thin on her mind and not even Penny, who stopped by every once in a while to deliver news from the bridge, could keep her stomach from clenching up and her palms from sweating whenever she thought about the Arbiter.

Penny pretended not to notice but one day while they were sitting in the lab, she finally spoke up. Putting down her data pad, she looked square at Emmaline and pursed her lips, furrowing her brow.

"There's something you're not telling me," She stated, cocking her head over to the side, "What's going on? Did something happen when you and the Arbiter sparred the other day? You've been insanely quiet since then."

"No," She saidâ€|a little too quickly for Penny's liking. She arched an eyebrow and gave the Commander a wry little smirk.

"You're such a liar! You should tell someone. I'm sure nobody wants to get in the way of Commander Emmaline Jackson and her prey." With that, she gave the commander a wink and then stood up, "You really



should talk to him. He's been just as secretive as you have. He hasn't spoken to Malone since they sparred a week ago. She's sweating bullets."

The thought of Malone sweating bullets made Emmaline grin at her computer, "What has she said?"

Penny shrugged and pursed her lips, "Nothing more than what I've told you. Literally, she's been basically pissed off at the world. He won't speak to her and she's trying to get under his skin. You could only imagine how that's going."

Emmaline chuckled and Penny looked up, the smirk replaced by a grin, "You laughed! That never happens. I don't think I've seen you crack a smile since I've known you."

"Just laughing at your antics, Winters."

"Sure you are, Commander Jackson." With another laugh, Penny stood up and brushed off her cargo pants, "You eating tonight or do you have more sparring with you know who?"

Emmaline rolled her eyes and shut her computer, "No sparring tonight unless you want to do it later. I might go back into the gym and do some other stuff though. You're more than welcome to join me."

"Maybe. Depends how I feel after dinner," She admitted, tucking a loose strand of bright red hair behind her ear, "I'll let you know."

"Roger." The two went their separate ways and Emmaline went to scout out the gym. Nobody was present when her boot clad feet hit the soft mats but she didn't trust that she wouldn't come back and Thel would be there. Just thinking about him made her stomach knot up. She quickly changed and walked out—only to find a familiar, angry looking Sergeant in the gym with her. Some angry rock music blared from the speakers and she looked like she was about ready to kill someone and throw their body out the nearest port.

"Commander," She said with a tight lipped smile, "How are you this evening?"

"Fine, Malone. Good to see you getting your exercise. Can't let space make you soft, huh?" She couldn't help but allow some smugness to penetrate the words. She attempted to keep a poker face as cold as ice but she felt the dry smirk playing across her features. "How are things going with Thel? He seemed taken with you."

"I think you and I both know the answer to that," She snapped, tossing Emmaline a stick with so much force she winced when she caught the wooden staff, "Thel mentioned something to one of his other Elites that you are a better sparring partner than me. Is it because you let him put his cock in your mouth?" She asked with a sneer. Emmaline's ears turned her and she narrowed her eyes.

"You have some nerve talking like that, Malone." Emmaline snapped, gripping the staff, "If you knew anything about Sangheli culture, you would know that anything sexual is done between those betrothed or a husband and a wife. Thel doesn't sleep around, unlike some people in

this room."

She smirked and swung the staff, testing the waters, "You must be talking about yourself then. You've ruined my chances, Jackson! I had a chance of being someone and of becoming a hero and you had to be a bitch and take that all away just so you could live out a past romance. He won't even speak to me, because of you!"

"He's not speaking to you because he's not interested, Malone." Jackson smirked and with a strangled scream, Malone lunged forward. Emmaline batted her staff away but she knew that Malone was fighting dirty. She jabbed upwards and Emmaline attempted to slap it away but when she did, she left her right side unguarded. Malone came through with a jab with her knee, catching Emmaline right in the side of the hip. She hissed and crumpled slightly, allowing Malone to slam the butt of her staff into Emmaline's chest, knocking her backwards.

"You're so weak, Jackson." Malone snarled as Emmaline attempted to throw her staff up to stop Malone from hitting her again. She managed to avoid being thrown over by bending down, the stick whistling over her head with a force that probably would have knocked some of her teeth out, "I should be the Arbiter's fucking bride! I'm strong! I can carry him! You're just gonna hold him back, you stupid ugly cunt."

With that last word, the staff connected with the side of Emmaline's head, knocking her to her feet. With another angered shriek, Malone began to beat Emmaline with the staff, relentless as a stormy sea against a castle of glass.

She couldn't move. All she could do was curl up into a ball and wait for her assault to end, covering her head with her hands. Her back was struck, the stinging welts gathering there as she began to cry. Emmaline never cried but the attack, both with words and the staff, made her walls weak and shatter. Finally, her voice found her and she began to scream. Malone matched her cries and finally, she dropped to her knees and began to beat any part of Emmaline she could reach with her fists.

Suddenly, the fists were gone and they were replaced with a roaring voice and a strangled moan. Malone's unconscious body went flying and Emmaline moved her aching body to stare up into the eyes of her savior. It was one of Thel's Elites, looking down at her with eyes that betrayed him. He was concerned for her. Why should he be concerned for her? She had broken his leader's heart and had gotten into a fight with the human that he might marry.

"Come along," He said softly as he gathered the Commander's broken body in his arms. She clung to him and not a single word was uttered from her as he walked her towards the medical bay. The doctor on duty took one look at the Commander and leapt up from his chair.

"What the hell happened?!" He demanded, ushering the Elite to put the broken body upon a cot. The paper crinkled underfoot and she opened her eyes to see Apollo standing at the pedestal beside her cot, his golden brows furrowed.

"She was attacked," He explained, "I heard her cries for help and sent word to the nearest sentient being. Thank you, by the way,

Hyria."

The Elite snorted and then nodded at the doctor, "I leave her in your capable hands. I will let The Arbiter know that she has been attacked along with the ship's captain." He turned on his heel and was gone. Apollo turned back to the doctor who was awaiting the diagnostics to be run.

"On the plus side, she wasn't hurt too badly. She did well, covering up her most vulnerable places. Her stats are all normal but there are a few fractured ribs. Fortunately, she doesn't have a concussion either. This could have been far worse."

"Who did it?" The doctor asked quietly, checking her pulse on her wrist.

Apollo pursed his lips and then bowed his head as if ashamed, "Sergeant Malone. She attacked the Commander—I don't know what happened to her."

"Speak of the Devil," The doctor said coldly as three marines came rushing into the med bay, an unconscious Malone between the lot of them.

"We found her in the gym," The youngest explained, "She was passed out on the ground. Looks like she hit her head pretty good."

"She deserved it," The doctor said simply, turning to his other patient, "As soon as you can, get Captain Cobb. I'm sure she'd like to hear this tale."

After some time, Emmaline finally felt like her head wasn't going to explode and so she sat up, just as the doctor stuck a needle right below her right breast. She hissed in pain and shot him a glare but he merely shrugged, "They're enzymes. They help speed up the healing process. Tomorrow, you should be right as rain—albeit a little sore. Captain Cobb is supposed to be coming down here in a few minutes to discuss what happened between you and Malone."

Sure enough, Cobb walked through the door and Emmaline managed a salute, wincing when she found a large bruise, "At ease, Jackson. Can you tell me what happened?"

Emmaline pursed her lips and closed her eyes, thinking about where she should start, "Sergeant Malone attacked me." She stated. The Captain rolled her eyes.

"Well, that's obvious. What made her attack you?"

"She believed that I was the reason that the Arbiter wasn't speaking to her anymore." She admitted. Cobb cocked her head to the side slightly as if not believing the Commander's story, "She said that since the Arbiter and I sparred, he hadn't spoken to her."

"What happened when you sparred with the Arbiter?" Cobb asked suspiciously. Emmaline looked down at her feet and frowned, "I see. Look Jackson, I don't care who the Arbiter marries but this shit isn't going to fly. You know it's not. Now I've got to mast one of my best sergeants on this fucking ship."

"You think it's my fault?!" Emmaline snapped, "She was the one who attacked me!"

"And she wouldn't have attacked you if you hadn't egged her on! She was our best bet, Jackson. Now she's looking at being discharged. I can't allow her to attack an officer like thatâ€|even if you probably deserved it."

"With all due respect Captain, that's a pretty shitty thing to say to someone." Emmaline said coldly, narrowing her eyes, "The Arbiter is a grownâ€|alien and he can choose whoever he wants."

Cobb's chest flared and she took a step closer to Emmaline, challenging her, "She was our best hope! He was warming to her and you ruined it."

"Captain, that's not very professional," The doctor mumbled under his breath. She shot him a glare and then turned on him.

"You can shut your mouth, Hawkins. This girl has been a thorn in my side the entire time she's been here!" She flicked her gun metal eyes back to Emmaline, "I will see if the Arbiter wants to marry another one of the girls. If notâ€|No. There's not going to be an if. He's going to marry one of the girls that have been chosen or the alliance is off." With that, she turned on her heel and the door opened, but not before she turned back to glare at the Commander, "I can't wait to get you the hell off my ship, Jackson. Consider yourself off the admin board for the Arbiter's potential mate," Emmaline felt as if she had been stabbed in the chest. Cobb was taking Malone's sideâ€|even if she had slightly egged on Malone, she didn't feel like she deserved the abuse she had just received at the hand of the captain. She sighed and looked down at her hands, feeling worse than even.

"Not to complete disagree with the captain but I think you're okay." Hawkins said softly, wringing his hands, "Malone deserved what that Sangheli did to her. She had not right to attack you like that."

"Thank you," Emmaline said with a wry smile, thankful to know she had friends hidden in the walls after all. She was sent back to her cabin not too long after that. She groaned as her ribs creaked and protested underneath her, reminding her that she wasn't as young as she thought she was. The day had been long and her head still ached where Malone had beamed her with the staff. She wasn't sure what would become of her but at this point, she didn't care. Emmaline closed her eyes and began to drift off into dreamland when the ship shifted slightly. She sat up, wincing and walked out of her quarters and peered out of a porthole, catching her breath when she saw the great and mighty shadow that penetrated the inky sky, peppered with golden membranes of extinct giants. Her breath hitched in her throat as she watched the cosmos explode around her. However, there was something else there. Something that didn't quite fit the smooth daunting leviathan that loomed before them. This was ragged and looked like it had seen battle and the end of the worldâ€|and then some.

In an instant, Emmaline's stomach clenched and her heart began to pound against her aching ribs. This was it. This was the sleeping giant they had been looking forâ€|but it wasn't alone. Ships circled

the planet that looked like they were well armed and humming with power. She felt someone step up beside her to look out into the darkness.

"This isn't right," Thel mused, not bothering to ask her how she was feeling. In truth, Emmaline was thankful he didn't ask. She didn't want to show that she was weak—and her weakness was him, "Nothing should be in the quadrant. What are Covenant ships?"

Suddenly, the ship lurched to the side and both were sent spiraling to the starboard side of the vessel. Alarms blared loudly and a voice was heard over the loudspeaker, clear and shaking.

"All hands to general quarters! This is not a drill! Apollo, wake up the people in cryo! I repeat, this is not a drill!" The line went dead and Thel and Emmaline looked at each other, eyes wide.

"No—this is impossible! There was a treaty signed—" he began to say as he and Emmaline raced through the belly of the beast.

"Apparently some of your guys didn't get the memo," She spat as she tried to keep up with the Arbiter, "Come on! We need to go!"

He split off from her at a corridor, "You go to your people. I have mine to take care of. I will see you again, I promise, Emmaline."

Emmaline nearly stopped in her tracks. He had used her first name, not Commander or Jackson. Her heart soared like a bird freed from a cage of doubt and anger and fluttered for a few moments around the sharp, metallic beams that ran from bow to stern. However, with another quick, angry crash, the bird came back and she hurried to her battle stations which was guarding Apollo. She grabbed a pistol from the rack and shoved it into her belt, realizing that she was again part of a war she wanted no part in. She frowned and hurried along with the rest of the crew, most who were stumbling around like they were drunk, effected by their cryo sleep.

"Boarding parties inbound! All crew prepare for impact!" The intercom warbled as the ship shook again. Emmaline stumbled over her feet, swearing softly. She finally took her place outside the AI's interlocking doors and pulled her pistol back, cocking it. Several other marines wobbled around uncertainly, their guns in hands. She didn't trust them not to shoot themselves.

"What's going on?" A younger man asked, blinking his bleary eyes, "And is your face alright, Commander?"

"Just—peachy," She snarled, waiting for anything to get passed them. However, most of the shooting was taking place farther on in the ship, the sounds of battle making Emmaline's palms sweat. It had been so long since she had been in real combat. She bit her lip and as soon as the first Grunt came around the corner, she open fired. The first shot fired was way over its head and it almost seemed confused. Fortunately, the marines on either side of her seemed to have control of their trigger fingers. The grunt dropped dead with a flurry of gunfire and hail of lead. The thing still smoked as the rest of the scouting party joined the fray. Emmaline's next shots

were true, landing in the shoulder and leg of advancing Elite. Each time she fired, she felt odd. This was so familiar yet so alien to her. Suddenly, with a burst of plasma, the marine on her right went down, his face contorted into a mask of pain.

"Hughes!" The other marine shouted as he glanced down at his friend, firing all the while. "Commander, we've gotta get out of here!"

"No!" She snapped angrily, "Keep firing!"

They brought down the Elite together but with a sudden burst of pain in her abdomen, she went down, crying out in agony. Protruding from her side was a violently purple spike from one of the little bastard's needleers. She glanced up to see the marine's eyes flash with fear as he dropped his gun and held up his hands, "I surrender!"

"You idiot!" Emmaline yelled but it was too late. Several blasts of plasma later, he was nothing more than a splatter of brain matter on the door. The Covenant weren't known for their mercy. The boy had learned that the hard way. Emmaline slunk to the floor, awaiting her life to leave her body but when she saw the feet of another Elite stop in front of her, she managed to look up into the face of the Sangheli who had brought her to the doctor's earlier that day! She groaned as they conversed in their language so quickly Emmaline couldn't catch it. However, what she did catch was "Arbiter", "mate", and "obsession." Two jackals stepped forward and grabbed her by her armpits only to start dragging her towards the bridge.

The words were short and curt. They discussed what had been happening and Hyria explained that the Arbiter was supposed to marry a human female. The other Covenant hissed in disgust and Emmaline's eyelids fluttered closed, her head lulling forward.

Something sharp collided with the bruise on the side of her head and she hissed, turning to see a Grunt watching her with his little piggy eyes. She made a face and wished with all her heart that she could reach out and smack the creature.

Finally, they arrived on the bridge and Emmaline let out a soft mew of horror when she saw the carnage. Cobb's body was sprawled on the ground but her head was gone. Emmaline didn't want to think about where it had gone. A group of Covenant soldiers held Thel back from striking them and his eyes were fixed straight on Emmaline's. She bit her lip and flicked her eyes to the rest of the bridge's crew who were being held at gunpoint. Penny was with them and she was trying so hard not to shake. Glancing down at her cargo pants, she could tell that the lieutenant had wet herself in her moment of fear and her eyes were red and puffy. Who could blame her? She had watched as Death stared her in the face.

"So this is the fabled love of the Arbiter," An Elite spoke in a deep, gritty voice as Emmaline was thrown to the grated deck. She yelled in pain as the needler spike was lodged deeper into her soft flesh, "So weak and pathetic."

"Shut your mouth face hugger," Emmaline groaned, trying to stand up. However, she was pushed back to the ground by a foot.

"He's fallen in love with a human?!" Another roared in laughter, "And such a pitiable one at that!"

Thel attempted to free his arms but winced when his elbow was wrenched behind his back, "Such devotion for one simple human." The first one said with what Emmaline assumed to be a smirk, "Why do you wish to help them? First we find this demon, then we find this ship with you on itâ€|We should kill you for your insolence and your rebellion against our gods."

"You fools!" Thel snarled, "The prophets are dead and the Sangheli are free from the grip of the Covenant!"

The first one snarled and nodded for the Elite holding Thel's elbow to let him go free, "We should kill you where you stand, Thel Vadamee. But our prophets believed in mercy." One handed Thel a plasma rifle and the pointed at Emmaline, "Kill the human and we will allow you to live. Join us on our campaign! Become the face of the Covenant again, Arbiter!"

"NO! Please Thel!" Emmaline begged, only to be forced to bow at the waist.

"Silence, human!" The Elite snarled as she looked down at the grating. She was going to die. Everyone on board the Witching Hour was going to die and she could do nothing about it. So many were already deadâ€|She closed her eyes.

Nobody saw the surface of the planet exposing its gaping maw, eating everything in sightâ€|including the Witching Hour. The Infinity was the first to as Emmaline felt the plasma rifle touch the back of her head.

"I'm so sorry, Emmaline." He murmured, the warmth traveling from the barrel of the gun to her skull.

The ship lurched forward, knocking the standing Covenant off their feet. The crew began to shift around and with burst of blue, the first Elite was sent flying backwards, his mandibles splayed in surprise and horror. Emmaline looked up to see Thel grabbing another weapon and firing into the belly of a Jackal that fell in an instant. The hint of rebellion took the crew by surprise and they joined in with open arms, grabbing weapons from corpses and firing into the din.

The ship was pulled forward and Emmaline stumbled over to the observation window, her eyes going wide when she saw the hole in the planet's surface.

"This is the UNSC Forward Unto Dawnâ€|Maydayâ€|Maydayâ€|" The radios crackled as the ship was sucked into the core of the monster, the bright flash of white radiance enveloping each member of the crew like the light at the end of the tunnel.

But to Emmaline, it felt like the train that was about to slam into her destiny.

\_"Yeah, destiny my ass," \_She thought snidely as the ship went plummeting into the great unknown of the planet.

## 7. Dreams and Distrust

The feeling of falling never hit Emmaline. No, she was far too unlucky for a fast and easy death, especially with Apollo now taking control of the Witching Hour. However, she did end up passing out from the pain that radiated through her body like a disease. She never got to witness the combat that came between the remaining humans onboard the ship and the remaining Covenant. She would have been proud to know that her people kicked some major ass though. No, Emmaline awoke in a darkened room with bandages around her lower body with Dr. Hawkins looking down at her with a frown on his face.

"Well, I never thought you were going to wake up," He said grimly, shining a light into her recently opened eyes. She winced and put an aching hand up to shield her face.

"What the hell, Doc?" She grunted, trying to sit up. She hissed in pain and fell back down on the cot, trying to keep her head from spinning. He looked older now, bags under his eyes and his cheekbones gaunt and hollow.

"Jackson...You would have been the 42nd person I've lost if you had died," He said grimly, "Almost everyone else is dead."

Her head spin once he said this. How many more were like her, in a Limbo state? She hated to even think about it. "How did we survive?" She asked softly, running a hand through her greasy hair.

"Apollo saved our asses, as per usual," Hawkins said with a little chuckle, "Gave that Covenant a run for its money, that's for sure. But when the Grav-Well opened up...Well, we were all toast. There was something else too, I think it was the Chief's ship." Hawkins' frown deepened and he furrowed his brow, "If the fall didn't kill him, the impact probably did. I'm sure there was a fuckton of debris where he was."

Emmaline closed her eyes and images of a gun being held to her head flickered into her mind's eye. "No, he's a SPARTAN. I'm sure whatever happened, he's still alive and breathing."

Hawkins chuckled and then sighed, "You sound like you know him personally."

She shook her head and winced slightly, "No, but I knew a SPARTAN who actually introduced me and my husband."

"Wow! Really?! Now this is a story I'd like to hear!" Hawkins picked up a small pill bottle and shook it, the bright purple pills rattling in their plastic container. He glanced down at his patient and smiled kindly, "But for now, I have other people I've gotta check on and you need your rest. These are sleeping pills so if you're having trouble finding the Sandman, take a few of these and you'll be off to Dreamland in no time."

"Thanks, Doc." Emmaline took the pills and popping two of them, placed the bottle on the table and closed her eyes, trying to ignore the dull ache in her belly from the needler ammo that had pierced her not too long ago. Questions still filled her mind, all fighting to be



the one she pondered on while the sleeping aids took her underneath the waves of unconsciousness.

\* \* \*

><p><em>The last thing she wanted were dreams but they came hard and fast, pounding into her subconscious mind with the speed of a machine gun. Kyle was there in one, standing at the altar of the church where they were married, his uniform all pressed and sharp. Excitement filled her belly as she stepped up to meet him, taking his hand and slowly standing up with him. However, when she finally faced the preacher and her husband was told to kiss the bride, her excitement turned to horror when the face of a mutated creature stared back at her. <em>

\_"Do you not love me?" It whispered, caressing her cheeks with its tentacle appendages, "You loved me before I looked like this, Emmaline. You loved me like you love that fucking split-face!"

—

\_She tried to turn away, break from its iron grip but it merely pulled her closer, "Look at me!" It hissed, "You lying bitch! You whore! They're the ones that did this to me and you're in love with him!" \_

\_"Let me go!" She screamed, tears rushing down her cheeks and fear bubbling up in her stomach. \_

\_"You'll soon become like me, Emmaline. You'll find out what it really means to be dead..." The creature threw back its head and laughed, the sound echoing through her dreams as she broke away and ran for her life. Darkness was her only ally as she continued to run through the dreamscape, trying to look for an escape. Suddenly, she felt something warm at her back and she turned to see a bright light in front of her, barely illuminating a room unlike any other she had ever seen. \_

\_"Hello, Child." The words were hard for her to interperate but she could just make them out. It took her a moment to realize her dreams were speaking to her in the Forerunner language! Her heart skipped a beat. This language had not been spoken in thousands, maybe millions of years and yet here she was, hearing it!\_

\_"Who are you?" She asked slowly in English. The voice stopped for a moment and then spoke again, this time in a language Emmaline could understand. \_

\_"A friend," The voice said simply, "A friend who has known you for a very, very long time." \_

\_"If you're my friend," Emmaline questioned, "Then what are you doing here in my dreams?" \_

\_The voice sighed as if slightly exasperated by her foolish question, "All in good time, my dear. All in good time. I will, of course, need your help soon. There is so much for you to do before you go."

—

\_"What do you mean?" \_

\_"Prophecy, dear child, is such a fickle thing." \_

\_"Do I have anything to do with it?" \_

\_"I'm not quite sure yet. It doesn't work exactly that way. I can see it in your eyes though; you want to be part of it so badly! Then again, there are others..." The voice trailed off slowly and the light began to fade. \_

\_"What do you mean, others?!" Emmaline demanded, "Come back! Who are you?!" \_

\_The voice was barely a whisper now, "All in good time, sweet girl. All in good..."\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Oi, snap out of it, Emmaline!" Someone was snapping their fingers under her nose and Emmaline was responding accordingly. She groaned and slowly opened her eyes, Penny's bright green eyes staring back at her.<p>

"Augh!" She yelped, almost falling out of bed. She looked a little worse for wear what with her swollen cheek and scratched up arm but for the most part, she looked unharmed, "Penny! What the hell were you thinking?!"

"You need to wake up!" She responded, throwing some clothes in Emmaline's direction, "The remaining Marines and the Elites are gonna tear each other apart unless you get out there and stick up for them!"

"What do you mean?" Emmaline questioned, making a face as she sat up.

"The Marines think that the Elites set them up, led their fleets to Requiem," She explained as Emmaline donned on her cargo pants and tank top, "They also think that they had something to do with Cobb's death which...well, they kinda did."

"Not my Elites," Emmaline muttered to herself, pulling her hair back into a bun, "Help me to...wherever they're fighting."

"Roger," Penny allowed Emmaline to lean on her as the two began to make their way outside. Emmaline started to protest but Penny put to bed those fears, "The planet's air is almost on par with that of Earth," She explained, "So no oxegyn masks needed!"

The two stumbled out into the sunlight, making Emmaline blink her eyes rapidly. The Witching Hour had landed almost perfectly in a clearing on the edge of a pristine lake that covered an area almost twice as big as the ship. The remaining sides were covered by dense jungles with low hanging vines and tropical looking plants. Next to a particularly large tree, the standoff was taking place, the two warring sides yelling at one another.

"We know you set us up!" One Marine snarled at the Elites, "Why else would the fucking split-faces know we're going to be here?!"

"Perhaps they intercepted your Reclaimer's signal as well!" An Elite responded with almost double the amount of hostility in his voice, "Did it ever occur to you that you aren't the only species in the universe, human?!"

"Fuck you, face hugger!" Another one stepped up to the plate, her hand already brushing her gun holster, itching for a fight. Emmaline hobbled between the middle of them and the squabbling ceased for a moment.

"Knock it the fuck off," She snarled at the Marines, "They had nothing to do with the Covenant who attacked us up there! They even helped us defeat them while the ship was going down."

A Marine snorted, "Yeah right! I saw one of the fuckers grab a gun and shoot Owens point blank while he was fighting a Grunt! They can't be trusted! The treaty is off."

"Commander Jackson is right," Thel butted in, "We fought against the rebels and helped you win back your ship!"

The Marine sneered, "Oh yeah, you call this winning?" He motioned to the jungle around them, "This is bullshit! Half of our crew is dead and we don't even know what's in that fucking jungle! This has been a deathtrap and these fuckers have known it since the beginning."

"Why wouldn't they have tried to take the ship beforehand?" Emmaline challenged, "They're warriors and damned good ones. If they had the opportunity, they would have used it. Look," She took a deep breath and carefully chose her words, "We're in this together. And if they haven't attacked us in our sleep yet, they won't attack us now."

This seemed to calm both groups down and muttering angrily, they went their separate ways, Thel walking up to Emmaline to speak to her quietly.

"Thank you," He said, "You didn't have to do that."

She frowned, "Don't thank me yet, Thel. I don't think we're out of the woods with either side just yet."

He nodded, "I think you're right about that." Both were quiet for a moment as an awkward silence settled around them before Thel spoke, "How are you feeling? I saw your wound. It looked awful."

She gave him a wry smile, "I've had far worse." She didn't need to mention that the far worse was when her heart had been ripped out by her husband's death. She wondered if she should tell Thel about her strange dream with the voice but then opted to keep it to herself. She didn't need to put more of a wedge between the two of them than there already was, "Do you know anything about this planet?" She asked.

He shook his head, "No," He said grimly, "Besides the fact that your AI landed your vessel in a perfect location. He's also trying to get a mayday signal out but it's proven difficult."

"Any sign of the Chief?"

"None that we can tell," Thel responded smoothly, "But that doesn't mean that he's not still alive."

She nodded, "Of course. He's a SPARTAN, that's what they do. Speaking of which, does anyone have any clue where we are?"

"As far as anyone has been able to tell, we ended up inside a Forerunner planet," Penny butted in, walking over to the two. Emmaline shot her a glare that went way over her head and glanced down at Emmaline's wound, "Ooh, your stitches popped, Em."

She didn't even bother correcting her friend as she was led back towards the ship. It slowly began to dawn on her that if they were never rescued, she would be here for the rest of her natural life...if she ended up surviving the week.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Hey y'all! I'm not dead! \*Happy dance\* Just really, really, reeeeeeeally tired and ready for bed. It took some motivation to write this chapter but it's done and A Promise I Will Keep will start rolling once more. I want to try and finish the rewrite before the year is out so...Good luck to me, ammirite? <strong>

\*\*Thanks to everyone for your kind words! I've really been having fun rereading stuff and...stuff. The original is still making me cringe but that's alright! You learn from your mistakes and you move on. A lot. Anyways, I'm about to log off for the night and then get back up at 4 AM so it's bedtime for me! Golly, I need a beer...\*\*

\*\*Wishing her head didn't hurt so bad, \*\*

><strong>Queenie<strong>

\*\*Halo (c) Bungie, 343 Industries\*\*

><strong>Emmaline, Penny, OCs (c) The Queen of Asgard<strong>

## 8. Attack on The Hour

The remainder of officers sat on what was left of The Witching Hour's mess deck, about an hour after their confrontation with the Elites. Emmaline sat in hushed silence, listening in on the conversations. Cobb was dead and the chain of command had become somewhatâ€|muddled. She thought it was just a terrible joke, men sitting around, squabbling like children while they, a stranded search party, now needed rescuing.

"I think we should still look for the Chief," One lieutenant argued, slamming his hands down on the table in frustration.

"What about ourselves?" A female commander scoffed, "We need to get the hell off this fucking planet. Fuck the Chief, I want out!"

"Well, we're not going anywhere until we put out an emergency beacon. Might be years till anyone finds us though. That's how long it took us to find the Chief." Another spoke up grimly, casting a dark shadow over the mess deck. Eyes were cast down as the thought of being on this planet for years started to sink down into their

bellies.

"Well, we aren't going to get anywhere just sitting here," Emmaline said briskly, standing up, "Apollo, how far can we send a beacon into space?"

The faint blue glow caught everyone's attention, "Around 37 light years on the first go around. But I estimate us to be at least 4500 out. It'sâ€¦" He sighed, "It's hard to tell. There's quite a bit of interference and I'm not quite sure if it's the planet itself or just where we are in space. Of course, we're also still getting that mayday call from the Chiefâ€¦"

"The Chief?!" Penny cried out, "Why didn't you tell us before, Apollo?"

He shot her a look that would make any sane human wince. However, Penny was far from sane, "Because you were all arguing amongst yourselves andâ€¦oh yes, you didn't ask."

"We don't need lip service from you, Apollo!" Someone snapped.

The AI rolled his eyes and then looked back at Penny but paused for a moment as if to listen to something, "Waitâ€¦I'm picking something else up. Hold onâ€¦" He closed his eyes and frowned, "Yesâ€¦there's something elseâ€¦Another call sign!"

The male commander leapt from his seat, "A search party?!"

"No, I'm not quite sure. I think they're on the outside of the planetâ€¦UNSC Infinity, call sign Alpha oh-two-seven Lima Bravoâ€¦Oh yes, it's a friendly." Apollo's eyes snapped open, "UNSC Infinity, UNSC Infinity, this is the UNSC Frigate Witching Hour, come in!"

He opened the channel and all waited on baited breath to see if their salvation had come at last. However, to their utter disappointment, there was nothing but static and some garbled speech. Apollo's eyebrows furrowed and he pursed his lips, "I thinkâ€¦I think someone else is trying to hail them as well. Maybe it's Cortana!"

"Then the Chief is alive!" The lieutenant exclaimed, "We should try and find him at least while we're waiting for rescue!"

"We don't know what's out there, Hawkins," the female commander warned, "We can be sure that the Covenant survived impact."

"We know how to deal with Covenant," Emmaline said coldly, glancing over at the commander, "And if we bring the Elites with us, then maybeâ€¦"

"Because that worked so well last time," The commander responded with ice in her voice, "Just because you have a thing for the face huggersâ€¦"

"Hey now, let's be cool," Penny interjected, glancing from the commander to Emmaline who was clenching her hands into fists, "Look, let's have some people stay here and at least send out a party to see if we can find the Chief. That was our main objective. The least we can do is try and find him if we know he's still alive, try and get everyone off the planet together."

"Before we do anything, we're going to see if we can triangulate that signal," Apollo piped up, "And see if we can boost it."

"Well, maybe we can find something to boost it while we're searching for the Chief." Emmaline responded, ignoring the murmurings, "If his AI Cortana is really with him, then maybe she can help us."

"I highly doubt it," Apollo muttered, "Alright, but I need to come with you. Justâ€¦don't get me anywhere near her."

"Uh, fair enough," Emmaline said, reaching down to yank Apollo. Suddenly, a hand, cold as ice and unforgiving as death was on her wrist. She whipped her head up to see Malone glaring at her, daggers in her eyes.

"And what about the rest of them? How are they going to send out a mayday?" She snapped, narrowing her eyes. Emmaline shrugged her hand away and scowled, pulling out Apollo's chip.

"When we finally triangulate Infinity, we'll tell them this is where the crash site is and have them come pick you all up." Emmaline responded smoothly, dropping the card into her pocket. With one final sneer, Malone turned away and stormed off to go see if she could cause more trouble.

"Yeesh, she needs a swift kick in the arse," Penny said, coming up to stand next to Emmaline, who jumped when she heard her voice.

"Jesus, you're going to give me a heart attack, Winters." She muttered, clutching her chest.

"Sorry, Emmaline. I didn't mean to," She said, flashing her a sheepish grin, "Who's all going on this magical adventure?"

"Not quite sure yet," Emmaline said, "I don't want to be heading it up though. Too much responsibility for other people's lives."

"I'll see if Lieutenant Hawkins wants to help me set it up then." She opened her hand to Emmaline, "Apollo, please."

"It's not like I'm not coming with you." Emmaline muttered, her eyes drifting down to Penny's open hand. After an awkward moment, Penny cleared her throat and closed her hand, dropping it down to her side.

"Alright, off to ask Hawkins what he wants to do." She turned on her heel and walked over towards the young lieutenant who seemed rather pleased to speak to someone of his own paygrade. Emmaline glanced over her shoulder to see where Malone went and to her surprise, didn't see her.

\_ 'Probably causing more trouble,' \_ She thought to herself with a smirk. Dare she ask for Thel and his Elites to go? If anything, it would probably cause more strife in the ranks but it always helped to have a couple extra guns in case things got hairy. Of course, these were their own people as well. \_ 'We fought our own people,' \_ Emmaline reminded herself as she walked from the ruins of The Witching Hour and over to the edge of the clearing where the Elites had set themselves up a small camp. Most just ignored her as she walked

through their ranks but some had the audacity to bear their jaws at her, growling deep in their throats. Maybe, she thought, this wasn't the best idea in the world.

"Thel?" She called, trying to pick him out until she finally found him sitting on a fallen tree, looking down at his extended energy sword. He glanced up as she approached and gave her a short, curt nod.

"Emmaline, what can I do for you?" He asked, sheathing his sword. She swallowed loudly and cleared her throat.

"Well, they're putting together a search party to go find the Master Chief. I guess there's a cruiser and they're trying to locate its position but it's proving to be a little more difficult than expected. Apollo thinks that if he could pinpoint the exact location and get the interference out of the way, he could contact it. I was just wondering if you'd like to take some Elites with us andâ€¦"

"Ha!" One scoffed as he walked by, "Fat chance, human."

"Jala, calm down." Thel snarled, narrowing his eyes at the younger Elite. He then turned his attention back to Emmaline and was silent for a moment, "Will you be accompanying them on their journey?"

She nodded, "I'm planning on it. I can read Forerunner and if this is a Forerunner world, I want to see if I can learn anything from it or at least help translate."

His mandibles broke out into a small smile, "Excellent. Then I will be a part of your search efforts. Jala and K'tea will stay with your humans, keep them safe from harm. The rest of us are at your disposal."

Emmaline nodded and gave him a little smile. Thel's heart gave a little flutter, "Thank you, Thel. This means quite a bit to me."

He lowered his head in a sort of bow, "The pleasure is all mine, Emmaline."

With one last nod, Emmaline turned on her heel and walked back to the camp, hoping that the childlike blush on her cheeks would go unnoticed by her cohorts.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Cortana frowned. The Cartographer was making no sense to her. After all the fighting that she and John had gone through to get here, and nowâ€¦she couldn't make any sense. She knew that The Witching Hour, the ship that had come to get them was already in the planet (She feared already taken over by Covenant but their AI, Apollo was still sending out a mayday), had crashed landed but the other ship, The Infinity, that was new to her. She hoped she could clear up the interference but unfortunately, it was proving to be a difficult task. <em>

\_"The Cartographer keeps acting like the transmissions coming from everywhere on the surface of the planet at once," She explained to the Chief, "It doesn't want to triangulate The Infinity's signal."

—  
\_ "What about that other ship? The Witching Hour?" The Chief asked.

>Cortana shook her head sadly, "I don't expect them to be much help. Their AI is sending out an automated SOS but with all the interference, he's probably not getting much out. Our best bet is The Infinity. If we can get a signal through to them, then we can go back and check out the wreckage of The Witching Hour but until thenâ€|"  
<em>

— "I understand," The Chief admitted with a slight nod. \_

\_ Cortana worked some more of her magic and frowned when one single red pinpoint came up on the map, "Oh waitâ€|I got Infinityâ€|"

— "That can't be right, scan again." The Chief demanded in his gravelly voice. \_

\_ Cortana's shrugged, "We've already passed through one layer of the planet's surface. It's not crazy to think that someone else made it deeper in than we did." \_

— "You mean the planet's hollow?" \_

\_ Cortana was quiet for a few moments, "Let me see if I can figure out a way for us to reach these coordinates that doesn't involve us digging a really big hole." After a moment, she closed the cartographer, "There's a terminus on the far side of this complex. We can create a portal from there and get to the planet's core." She averted her eyes for a few moments and the Chief took the opportunity to speak. \_

— "What is it?" \_

— "I dunnoâ€|" She murmured, closing her eyes in thought. \_

\_ "If we have a shot of getting you back to Infinity, then we're taking it." He responded quickly. Cortana opened her eyes and sighed deeply.\_

\_ "Okayâ€|" She breathed, trying to regain her composure. He reached out to yank her chip and shoved it back into his helmet, ready to get home.\_

\* \* \*

><p>The search and rescue party consisted of sixteen enlisted, four officers and a handful of Elites who looked less than thrilled to be part of the evolution. Emmaline couldn't remember the last time she had been decked out in full combat gear but she was ready for it. The firefight on The Witching Hour had gotten her blood pumping and ready to rock and roll. Holding the gun in her hands made her feel powerful, like she could take on the world.<p>

"Emmaline, we're briefing!" The other commander, a man named Louis called over to her so she jogged over, feeling the weight of the assault rifle bounce against her back. She glanced over at Thel who also looked like he was geared up for a fight and then back at



Commander Louis, "Alright, I don't want any of you getting separated. If you see something of interest, make sure you call it out and we'll all go look at it. Commander Jackson, you're my second in command."

"Roger that, Commander." She said with a nod.

He returned it with his own movement, "Our main objectives including finding Master Chief John 117. Our second objective is getting a transmission out to the UNSC Infinity. Any questions?"

None were raised, "Alright, Commander Jackson is in charge of holding onto Apollo's chip but he'll be locked in with all our interfaces. If we run into a party of Covenant, you are authorizedâ€|no, required to use lethal force, do I make myself clear?" He shot a look at the group of Elites who mostly nodded, the key word being mostly. "Good. Alright, we're heading to the East, the last known pinpoint of the Master Chief's AI, Cortana. This may be false since she may be declining into rampancy but it's the best chance we've got. Alright Marines, let's get that Warthog loaded up and ready for action."

The one Warthog they had onboard had been undamaged during initial impact but unfortunately, it only held a handful of people. "Jackson, you can ride in the Warthog since you're my second in command." Louis offered her. She raised a hand to politely decline the seat, allowing Penny to scramble up into it.

"Thanks for the seat, Emmaline." She said, giving the Commander a smile.

"Hey, hey. That's Commander Jackson to you, Winters." Louis snapped.

"It's fine, Commander. I think we can all appreciate a little lax on protocol in this situation." Emmaline said quickly.

"Alright, if you insist," Louis responded tightly, the Warthog revving up and pushing a path into the jungle. In the distance, a great edifice loomed before them, just beckoning the travelers to investigate.

\* \* \*

><p><em>"Where's Infinity?" John asked, trying to make sense of the impossible. In front of him was a massive purple orb that hovered in the air connected on either side by a beam of the same color.  
<em>

\_"This is the planet's core alright, but Infinity isn't here," Cortana mused, "That satellite in the middle thoughâ€|it's relaying both Infinity's and Witching Hour's transmissions. Althoughâ€|"

—

\_"Although what?" \_

\_"Those beams on either side of it are acting like interference. If we brought them down, we could possibly use the satellite to respond to either ship." \_

\_"Can you get us there?" \_

\_She flicked her fingers over a virtual keyboard and another portal appeared, "Opening a gate to the nearest beam pylon. Yank me and let's go." \_

\_He did as Cortana requested and then with a sigh, looked over at the portal. John was getting too old for this bullshit.\_

\* \* \*

><p>The tower loomed ahead like a beacon that pierced the sky, "You can bet that's crawling with Covenant." A private joked softly, earning a swift jab in the ribs from Emmaline with her elbow.<p>

"You know we have Elites with us," She snapped, glaring at the young man. He scoffed and rolled his eyes before walking over to talk to his friend. Emmaline winced and her fingers brushed the side where her stitches were.

"Are you feeling alright, Emmaline?" Thel asked, coming to stand next to her.

"Yeah, I'm just a little sore from that Needler ammo," She admitted, "Nothing I can't shake off though."

Thel nodded slowly and glanced back to the trail they had blazed, "If you want, I can escort you back to The Witching Hour andâ€|"

"No! It's fine. I want to be here withâ€|" She stopped herself before she could say 'you', "The crew. They need someone to translate. What if there's some horrible trap that they don't know about because they can't read the signs?"

"This is true." Thel admitted with a little chuff, "Wait, stop the vehicle. I'm picking something up on my radar."

True to his word, Emmaline noticed that she too could also see something on her HUD that was lighting up with red and was closing inâ€| "COVENANT!" Someone roared. Emmaline dove behind the Warthog just as a bolt of green plasma shot over her head, She activated her newly designed shield and whipped her assault rifle around to fire into the oncoming tank of a Grunt. It fell only a couple of feet away from her as she struggled to get to her feet, her ears ringing from the noise. Someone grabbed her and pulled her back around the Warthog as the roar of gunfire surrounded her.

"Stay here," Thel snarled in her ear as he returned to the fray of battle. Of course Emmaline wasn't too keen on following orders and instead stood back up, her finger on the trigger as she sprayed and prayed into the oncoming force. Swearing under her breath, she ducked back behind the Warthog just as a plasma round whipped by her face, searing off half of her eyebrow.

"Fuck!" She snarled, reloading her assault rifle. She then peeked back up to see yet another wave of Covenant approaching them. She once more pulled the trigger, focusing her attack on a rogue Elite who had his eyes locked on hers.

"Commander! Stop!" Someone yelled and she glanced over to see one of

their Elites looking at her, his eyes full of hatred and anger. It was in that second that the rogue Elite took his chance. He leapt over the Warthog and grabbed Emmaline by her throat, lifting her high into the air.

Everything stopped. She couldn't breathe and his fingers around her gullet were making her see stars. Emmaline gagged, trying to catch her breath but finding it impossible.

'So this is it,' she thought as her windpipe was crushed and she felt the cold metal of his plasma pistol in her side, 'this is how I die.'

However, to her surprise, she felt herself fall to the ground, coughing and sputtering as she tried to crawl away, the Elite's body falling to the ground right next to her, obviously dead. She hadn't even gotten the chance to look up when she heard an Elite's grunt and the hiss of an energy sword being drawn.

"How dare you, Q'rin?!" Thel roared, grabbing at the Elite who seemed rather calm about the whole thing, "How dare you do such things?!"

The Elite's mouth turned into a sneer as Emmaline looked around to inspect the damage. They were lucky. Everyone had survived the encounter except the Covenant and it didn't look like there were more. She sighed and put her head down on the ground as the arguing continued to escalate in their native tongue until with a wet slicing sound, the Elite's body also fell to the ground. Emmaline opened her eyes and felt someone helping her up.

"Are you alright?" Penny asked softly, the two stumbling back to the car.

"I think so," Emmaline muttered, trying to make sense of what all had just happened, "Are you alright?"

Penny had come away with a massive head injury, the entire right side of her face coated in dark red, "No, I'm fine. Don't worry about me. We're heading back to camp."

"But what about the Chief?" Emmaline questioned.

"None of us are in any shape to fight," Penny responded softly, "We can't find the Chief if we can't even fight."

Emmaline nodded and then glanced back at the spiraling building behind them, "Did we figure out what that thing was?"

"No, but we'll be coming back this way I'm sure." Penny said, flicking her eyes towards the edifice, "We can explore it then."

Emmaline nodded as the remaining few on their feet helped the wounded ease into the back of the Warthog. "Did we lose anyone?"

"Almost," Penny admitted grimly, "Louis is in bad shape. And of course," Q'rin." She frowned over at the Elite's fallen body, shaking her head, "I can't believe he did that to you. Of course, I think the Arbiter over reacted too."

"He called me, took my attention off the other Elite." Emmaline recalled.

"I know, I heard." Penny said, letting Emmaline walk on her own. She was shaking and her head was still pounding but other than that, she was in good shape to walk. They started walking back towards the campsite, leaving the Covenant in the clearing they had made.

A cool wind, drifted through her loose hair, making Emmaline take one last look back at the tower before turning back to hobble back to the wreckage.

She swore the wind had said her name.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Thank you all who have been reviewing! I'm getting a lot of positive remarks about the rewrite and that makes me just that more excited to keep on writing it. It's seriously going to be a pretty fun ride from here on out. <strong>

\*\*I don't really have much to say about this chapter except I apologize it took so long to come out. As always, reviews are appreciated as are favorites and follows. \*\*

\*\*Falling asleep with her eyes open, \*\*  
><strong>Queenie <strong>

\*\*Halo (c) Bungie, 343 Industries\*\*  
><strong>Emmaline, OCs (c) The Queen of Asgard<strong>

End  
file.